

A study on Universal Values of Literati in Tang Dynasty – Take Idylls as an Example

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Abstract. Tang Dynasty is an important era in China's history. It reached a high level of development both in productive forces and in humanity from the beginning of Tang Dynasty to An Lushan Rebellion, during which the universal values and literati in Tang Dynasty formed. Nowadays, various historical researches are focused on poetry and all kinds of literature in Tang Dynasty, probing into the level of productivity based on materials such as historical and cultural relics to further speculate the development of the humanity in Tang Dynasty. The author believes that, the poetry in Tang Dynasty, to a large degree, directly reflects the psychology of literati. This paper, from the perspective of the pastoral poetry of Tang Dynasty, probes into the universal values of literati in Tang Dynasty.

The inheriting of idylls in Tang Dynasty

From Wei and Jin Dynasties, representative hermit poets, Tao Yuanming taking the lead, have made a great difference in Chinese history. In Tao Yuanming's poetry, he described the happy and pleasant pastoral life with many singings. And his values are then often researched and analyzed by later literati from the angle of idylls. He, as the representative of his time, established universal values as a model. Because of this opportunity, Tao Yuanming's idylls were fixed and stayed as an important theme of Chinese classical poetry, highly developed in Tang and Song Dynasties when poetry were extremely prosperous. The two important dynasties, Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty, generated a lot of idylls and great poets famous for writing idylls, according to the historical records handed down from that time. Poetry is used to express one's ambition, so idylls in Tang Dynasty presented a time of national peace and order. Why? Because peace is an ideal state of human society, a tradition of Chinese ancient literati and it is the life ambition achieved by well ordering and the ultimate goal achieved through world peace.

In Song Dynasty, there was a Confucian named Zhang Zai who explicitly proposed one mission of literati. That is: "peace for future generations". In fact, the inheriting of Tao Yuanming in Tang Dynasty is more reflected in culture, rather than in poetry. As we all know, Tao Yuanming created in the "Peach Blossom Spring and poetry" a pure and beautiful world where grass was fresh, the ground was flat, houses stood in a line and both the old and young were contented and happy. Analyzed from a practical point of view, this is in fact a special world of imagination, similar to the Utopia in Wei and Jin Dynasties. In this beautiful kingdom of literature, in fact the content of idylls represented people's longing for peace in a time of war, turmoil and chaos while from the aspect of humanity, idylls embody the authors' ultimate ideal of life, the demand for a good life, the thinking about the darkness in society and the diligent pursuing for their emotion. All the above has gone beyond the artistic value of poem itself, in which their unique life experience and process are also described. Literati in Tang Dynasty sang with the poems and used many literary quotations. For those who were in plight, they particularly had more admiration and affection for Tao Yuanming Taoyuan, reflecting their agreement to Tao's ideas. It was because of their identification in emotion that they made great imitation and innovation in art creation. Poets of Tang Dynasty were generally believed by the scholars to be a special group with spiritual cleanliness. With Tao Yuanming as an idol of their creation, the pursuit of creation and idea, together with the idea of being plain and quiet, imperceptibly integrated into their blood, affecting the values of whole Tang literati through these groups with cultural discourse. And in a silent transforming influence, the values will be carried forward.

A longing for peace in the creation of idylls with the spiritual subject of Taoyuan

In fact, peace is easily connected with anchorite ethos. But it is easy to confuse these two, because their spirits are different. First of all, the formation of the anchorite ethos took place in the late Eastern Han Dynasty when there was much political corruption and social darkness. Motivated by the need to fight the dark social reality and the preservation of their own, many scholars were on the hermit road. This is actually a negative attitude. Peace is a positive attitude. History has it in "History of the Latter Han Dynasty--Hermit Biographies Sequence" that "the Han Dynasty is in decline, Wang Mang usurped the throne. Soldiers are full of indignation. So it is time to split and destroy the crown. People holding their hands to do this are countless." Therefore, hermit mentality of scholars is not harmonious and it is especially evident in Wei Jin literati. During Wei and Jin Dynasties, there are numerous intrigues, ups and downs here and there, making people involved in unrest and political struggles. Many scholars saw it clearly and chose to ignore, their attitude to politics changing from anxiety to indifference, from enthusiasm of participating to negative retreat. From a psychological point of view, this is a kind of passive resistance. Only the seeking for the joys in forests and countryside can give their own spiritual solace; only seclusion can protect them. During Wei and Jin time, the irreconcilable contradictions between ideal and reality, individual and society caused inharmonious mentality in the hermit poets in Wei and Jin Dynasties. In Tang Dynasty, the values of literati have made a big difference. The Tang Dynasty society has its ups and downs, prosperity and decline. This is a kind of social law, and at the time when social development was not systematic, people were facing terrible social conditions and had no solution. It may be attributed to the "mandate of heaven". Destiny can not be violated. Therefore, reclusive feelings at that time were reflected, especially after the "An Lushan Rebellion" and the breaking down of middle Tang Dynasty. Whether pastoral poets or those who wrote frontier fortress scenery themed poems, their hearts can't help generating contradiction--on one hand they will have a painful feeling to sigh declines and lament the hardships; on the other hand, they also exclaim over their bad luck and the lack of opportunity to serve their country. The lack of a sense of achievement, sense of mission and realistic sense of powerlessness gives them response to inner defense mechanism when seeing those who suffered from the war, were forced to leave their hometown and became destitute and homeless, inner response. At that time, the longing that was not representative for peace became a kind of projection, a real hope for them to live and work in peace and contentment. And this also embodied an important factor in Tang people's universal values, which is peace. "Thinking of and thanking Tao's thoughts and sigh for their bad life." Take Du Fu as an example. He deeply experienced the rise, fall and changes brought about by An Lushan rebellion. His state of mind also changed a lot, from concerning only "himself" to thinking more about the people at the bottom of the society; his idylls reflected his life tragedy and longing for Taoyuan. We can track and compare the lives of Du Fu and Tao Yuanming, which looked like two similar parallel lines. Although in different times, they experienced the same difficulties of life. Besides, DU witnessed the different social status before and after An Lushan rebellion, making him look forward to the ideal society described by Tao Yuanming in his "Peach Blossom Spring", which was also a profound hope.

In fact, many poets of Tang Dynasty wrote poetry of Taoyuan based on universal values. These poems had something to do with the idea of escaping from Qin in the "Peach Blossom Spring", expressing the desire to live in Taoyuan, which agrees to Tao Yuanming's idea. For example, the middle Tang poet Li Yi's "to come across many old people when seeking Taoist Ji" In it there were several sentences saying to seek a monk in a cloudy day and see bamboos and new clothes made of bamboo leaves. There were 2 children help me to sit and 5 old men showing me around. Water was silent under the pine trees and grass seemed quite greener in winter. People who I met said there was a Taoyuan Hole which was used to escape from Qin. This poem describes the scene when Li Yi happened to meet several other men in search of Ji Taoist. He had mixed feelings after being in the relationship with them. What we need to note is, Li Yi is considered as a frontier fortress poet in the academic circle. His career, compared to that of Du Fu, was quite smooth. He had been engaged in many different positions. As a Frontier Fortress poet, he experienced a lot of wars. In one of his few idylls he expressed his universal values of cherishing peace and stability

after many wars. In this poem he described the place where Taoist Ji as a wonderful place: Water was silent under the pine trees and grass seemed quite greener in winter. This was a prospect many people were looking forward to then. And at the end of the poem the sentence--People who I met said there was a Tiaoyuan Hole which was used to escape from Qin—is another way to express the same idea because to escape from Qin is to avoid wars, disasters and misfortune. So this poem euphemistically expresses the writer's dream, which is a sign of universal values in idylls. In fact, in Tang Dynasty, the political environment is relatively mild. Not as harsh as that in Ming and Qing dynasties. In a relaxed political environment, people actually had no need to use seclusion to combat society. And the scholars were trying to return to Tao's seclusion, which could be regarded as a way to view the then society through a civilian mind. They could find a balance in society, politics, countryside and one's spiritual realm, producing a harmonious mentality so as to complete the transformation of literati's seclusion. And this way embodies the themes of peace and to escape from wars incisively and vividly.

The joy of universal values of interest in humanity and the worldly revealed in idylls of Tang Dynasty

Idylls in Tang Dynasty are largely extensive real rural landscape that reflects the joy in village and countryside. From the way the themes are expressed, idylls in Tang Dynasty mainly inherited the tradition of Tao poems--to focus on description of tranquil and beautiful rural scenery and leisurely pastoral life so as to express the poet's leisurely and carefree mood. This aspect can be seen from Wang Ji's poem "to look at the countryside": to look at the dusk in the east, thinking what to lean on if hiking there. Trees turned yellow while the mountain has sunshine of the setting sun on it. The shepherd boy is driving calves back and the hunter is carrying grasshoppers. There are no acquaintances and long songs are for memorizing plucking. From the second sentence, we can see it describes a static scene of autumn. What the poet saw sketched a picture of autumn evening for us. Yellow is every tree's color and the rolling mountains are dyed with the color of sunset--the bleak twilight. Seemingly quiet and open, this scene gives people a feeling of desolation and disappointment. However, this is a prospect beyond the description of idylls. Throughout the poem, although what is displayed in it is a depressed lonely mood, a lively scene of the life in a forest seen by a shepherd is presented in front of us. The shepherd boy was singing folk songs, cheerful and calm. The beauty of worldly life and Tang People's values for their life are also expressed in a poetic way. As the Tang Dynasty literati, although they are longing for worldly values, because the literati have their own sense of mission and responsibility, their universal values have something to do with lonely and lonely feelings. Their concerns about the country and the people, and their melancholy can not be eliminated so they had to turn to Boyi and Shu Qi. Singing "plucking" song, the writer is expressing his seclusion. The poet describes an idyllic and laid back country life, and expresses his distance from this life and the loneliness and melancholy caused by this life. With respect to the bureaucratic strife, peace and quiet of countryside really exist. But inevitably the construction of literati's value system has something to do with loneliness and melancholy which is covered by the happy, upset, silent and harmonious tone in the idylls.

Conclusion

Contradictory mentality of literati sometimes also shows their loyalty to human nature, emancipation of nature and their mind to enjoy the nature. This point is particularly evident in Wang Wei. In Wang Wei's "seven poems of idylls" there is a sentence: "the fishermen besides the apricot and the people in the Peach Garden". Reading through the poem, we can see that poems are written to express the joy of they get living in the countryside, through which poems get much satisfaction both physically and mentally. So they can be seen as immortals because they are elegantly free and easy! He also said that "to live back in a slum and have 5 willows on the opposite side. This kind of tranquil and leisurely mood overflows on the line, not only reflecting his literati complex, but also the profound influence on him imposed by the secular life and ideas. He couldn't

get rid of the era, nor is it possible. Therefore, his poetry, in addition to individual sustenance, embodies literati's value orientation of Tang Dynasty, giving us a more complete presentation. And through his vision, the literati of Tang dynasty can be studied. Another similar one is Zu Yong's "to invite Liu to dinner on Tomb-sweeping Day " where he mentioned: the flowers are covering the eaves and the birds on the bamboo are peeping people". This is quite vivid and interesting. In fact, it reflects the pure friendship between neighbors, the love between family members and the joy through making poems with friends. In addition, the owner of the garden was also noble and unsullied. And the garden is full of happiness and harmony. All these are expressing and passing literati's universal values, yearning for the secular, yearning for a better life, praising the prosperity of Tang Dynasty and the spirits of Tang Dynasty. What has also been carried forward through thousands of years to the next generations, apart from the achievement of poetry, is how to inherit at present the essence of the universal values of Tang Dynasty and how to educate people live in the moment. It is an important subject of our research and thinking.

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