

On Ecological Consciousness Contained in Ancient Chinese Poetry

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ABSTRACT. *There are abundant ecological ideas and wisdom in ancient Chinese poetry. The concept of harmony between man and nature is of great significance for us to protect the ecological environment and promote the sustainable development of economy and society.*

KEYWORDS: *Ancient poems, Man and nature, Ecological literature*

1. Introduction

Engels once said that Chinese classical literature was “the most brilliant flower on the earth”. [1] As an important part of China's classical literature, ancient poetry is undoubtedly the soul and essence of this brilliant flower. The ecological ideas and ecological wisdom embodied in ancient poems are of reference significance for us to protect the environment and promote the sustainable development of our economy and society.

2. Green Mountains and Blue Rivers; Wild Crane And Floating Clouds.

Ecological literature is always a type in Chinese literature. In *The Book of Changes*, “Tao means the combination of Yin and Yang”, which can be regarded as the earliest ecological literature in the pre Qin period. In ancient literature, the writing of nature has always been one of the important themes. Most contents of the ancient Chinese poetry are closely related to the natural landscape. These profound philosophic thoughts, such as the unity of man and nature, the harmony between man and nature, and the harmonious coexistence of different kinds of beauty, are the cultural gene of the Chinese nation.

Yuanming Tao, an idyllic poet in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, wrote the poem as follows. “In February, spring rain falls with thunder in the east. The hibernating animals wake up; plants are watered and stretch themselves. Spring swallows fly briskly into my house; their nests still exist. Even the swallow comes home with its spouse. You have left me for a long time; our garden is full of weeds. My heart will not change, but I don't know what's in your mind.” This poem describes the scene of a pair of swallows flying into the poet's house when spring returns in February. It expresses the latest changes of nature in spring in natural and plain language, and humorously describes the poet's serious attitude towards life and his unswerving character through the trivial matter of swallows returning the old nest.

Lingyun Xie, a poet in the Southern Dynasty, believed that the natural landscape was an independent aesthetic object and created the school of landscape poetry in the history of Chinese literature. Among his works, there are many natural and fresh sentences. In spring, “grass grows in the pond; birds on the wicker change their songs”; in autumn, “the open sand shore appears more bright and clean. The sky is high; the air is cool; the autumn moon is particularly bright”; in winter, “the moon shone on the snow, and the north wind was fierce and shrill”. Depicting natural scenery from different angles gives readers the enjoyment of beauty. Lingyun Xie greatly enriched the realm of poetry with his creation, and identified landscape poetry as a school in the history of Chinese poetry. The most famous *Shanju Ode* is a realistic Fu with rich ecological contents, which embodies the author's ecological consciousness. On one hand, the article reflects the authors' life consciousness, that is, paying attention to human beings and pursuing the extension and sublimation of their own life, including the maintenance of body and the cultivation of spirit. At the same time, he also respects and cherishes other lives. On the other hand, the mountain and forest consciousness can be found. The author advocates to rationally utilize biological resources in mountains and forests, and pursues the spiritual value of the mountain and forest by taking nature as his spiritual home. [2]

Since then, the content of ancient poetry has always been integrated with nature. The humanized nature

becomes a part of daily life. Those well-known pastoral poems and landscape poems reflect this feature. In *Looking Over Tianmen Hills*, “the clear river and green mountains on both sides” are not only the beauty in the eyes of ancient poets, but also the reality that we modern people are trying to create: make the water more beautiful, the mountains more green, and the sky bluer. Such ecological development concept should be our ideal pursuit.

Landscape poetry reached its peak in the Tang Dynasty. In Mu Du's *Journey To the Mountain*, the author wrote the forest in autumn. “In late autumn, I went up the winding mountain path. There were a few houses on the top of the mountain, as if the houses were built on white clouds. I stopped because I liked the view of maple woods in the evening; the frost-beaten maple leaves were redder than flowers in February.” [3] It describes that in autumn, maple leaves turn red. It seems that the mountain is covered with bright and glow brocade. The scene is gorgeous and vibrant.

Bai Li, a poet in Tang Dynasty, left many famous poems about mountains and waters that can be called the eternal masterpiece. The poem, *Watching the Lu Mountain Falls*, writes, “sunshine censer living purple smoke, a waterfall hung before the stream. Waterfalls three thousand feet, down suspected Galaxy nine days.” It vividly depicts the magnificent scenery of Lushan waterfall and reflects the poet's boundless love for the motherland. Li has a rich imagination, strange thoughts, magnificent momentum and unrestrained feelings. His poems are characterized by natural beauty, true beauty and unrestrained freedom. These bold and lyrical poems bring the readers into the artistic conception of “so many beautiful mountains and rivers in our country”, thus arousing people's affinity and love for nature.

Fu Du has a very real observation and understanding of the natural beauty. In his poems, sentences describing natural beauty can be seen everywhere. The sixth part of *Seven Quatrains of Looking for Flowers Alone by the Riverside* goes as follows. “In the garden of Madam Huang, flowers are full of path. Tens of millions of flowers are so heavy that the branches bend down. Among fragrant flowers, there are butterflies flying and dancing; the unrestrained nightingale chirps happily.” The poem *A Quatrain* goes as follows. “Two golden orioles sing amid the willows green; a row of white egrets fly into the blue sky. From my window the snow-crowned western hills are seen; beyond the door the east-bound ships at anchor lie.” In *Spring Return*, the writer wrote, “I watch the gulls floating quietly, swallows slanting in the breeze.” These poems extol natural beauty are beautiful and moving. In *Visiting Two Temples of the Yuelu Mountain*, he wrote, “the undulating hills are like my undulating chest; the flowers and birds in the mountain are my friends.” The poet wants to keep company with the natural landscape and make friends with the flowers and birds. This kind of feeling of being close to nature is particularly moving.

Juyi Bai's poem, *Spring Trip to Qiantang Lake* writes, “a few early orioles fighting to fly to warm trees; swallows carry the spring mud to the nest”. The sentences are very lively, and cultivate our consciousness of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature. In *Memories of the South*, the colours in the spring of Jiangnan (south of the Yangtze River South) are gorgeous and dazzling. “The sunrise riverside flowers more red than fire; in spring the green river waves grow as blue as sapphire”. The scenery is unforgettable and haunting in our minds.

Yu Han wrote in *Late Spring*, “flowers and trees know that the spring will soon leave, and they want to keep the pace of spring. They are competing for beauty, all of a sudden, red, purple and other flowers blossom like the colorful brocade. Poplar and elm flowers do not have bright colors; they can only become snowflakes all over the sky.” This poem uses personification rhetoric to express the poet's thoughts and feelings of cherishing spring. At the same time, it also implies the meaning that we should seize the opportunity to advance with the time and create a better future.

Wei Wang pushed the landscape poetry to a peak, and there were countless famous lines and articles. In *Trip to Taoyuan*, he wrote, “the fishing boat goes down the stream, in pursuit of the wonderful spring scenery. The peach trees on both shores are in blossom. Sitting in the boat, I enjoy watching the red flowers, and forget how far we go; down to the green river, no one can be seen in this journey.” The long and swaying fishing boat, the peach on the bank, the green spring mountain and the clear green river in the poem show readers a poetic landscape painting.

Yangming Wang, a great literary master in Ming Dynasty, thought “the wind and moon are my friends; enjoying natural sceneries is my hobby.” He wrote many poems on natural landscapes, especially the common scenes of mountains and rivers and ordinary farming. For example, “there are many things to do in Yuanmen spring, but the bamboo yard has never been idle. I put the boat on a strong wave, and then I saw a layer of green rose. The mountain field is dry for a long time and meets the rain. Don't say that the pond is dangerous at the end of the day. The terrain is incomparable to the people.” It shows that the poet completely relaxed himself in the natural landscape, so that he can hear the most direct call of the soul in the natural world.

Confucius said: “the benevolent enjoy the mountain, the wise enjoy the water.” In ancient literature, the writing of nature has always been one of its themes. Artistic conception is the highest state when man and nature are integrated, and it is also one of the aesthetic characteristics of ancient poetics. The thought of the unity of nature and man and the love for the natural environment shown in these poems are valuable and can be called the earliest ecological literature.

3. Climatology Contents in Poems

China's poetry has a long history; it has extensive and profound contents. The contents involve weather and climate knowledge are common seen.

3.1 Climate Difference between Mountains and Plains in Ancient Poetry

Juyi Bai wrote in *Peach Blossom in Dalin Temple*, “in April the flowers withered; but in the temple on the top of the mountain, the peach flowers are in full bloom. I once regret that the spring has gone nowhere to find, but now I know the spring comes here.” The poem vividly describes climate differences in plains and mountains. In the same season, the temperature in the mountain area is lower than that in the plain area. When the spring comes to the end and summer begins in the plain area, the mountain just reaches the temperature of spring; therefore, “in the temple on the top of the mountain, the peach flowers are in full bloom.”

3.2 In Ancient Poetry, Temperature in Different Slopes of the Mountain is Also Different

Yuanzai Liu of the Tang Dynasty once wrote in *Morning Plum*, “the spring breeze blowing towards a tree is divided into two parts: one is the warm wind blowing towards the south branch, and the other is the cold wind blowing towards the north branch.” Through writing plum blossom, the poet shows the temperature difference of different slopes. The branches and leaves on the south slope grow in the warm wind, while the branches and leaves on the north slope are bathed in the cold wind.

3.3 "Urban Heat Island Effect" in Ancient Poetry

You Lu, a poet in the Southern Song Dynasty, wrote plain and natural poems in his later period. These poems are easy to understand. In *Autumn Reminiscence*, “the gardener picked cucumbers by the shelf; the village girl picked green flowers along the fence. The city is still hot; autumn comes earlier to the countryside.” The first two sentences describe the leisurely scene of rural life; the last two sentences describe the phenomenon that in the same season, the air temperature in the city is significantly higher than that in the outskirts, which is what we call the heat island effect today.

It can be seen that Chinese poetry is not only a supreme palace of art, but also a large encyclopedia. From the perspective of literature, it shows the joys and sorrows of life. From the perspective of climatology, many of the well-known verses in these poems contain rich knowledge of geography and meteorology.

3.4 Famous Sentences about Seasons in Traditional Poetry

“Why use the Qiang flute to play the plaintive, *Willow*, to complain that the spring has not come; beyond the Jade Gate vernal wind will never blow”. The poem describes that the summer monsoon in China cannot reach the northwest region. “As if the vernal breeze had come back overnight, adorning thousands of pear trees with blossoms white.” The sentences describe Northwest China. In winter, the cold front comes with wind and snow. “The west is veiled in the rain, the east enjoys sunshine. My gallant is as deep in love as day is fine.” The sentences reflect the characteristics of convective rain: great intensity, small range and short duration. “In Huangmei season, all houses are wrapped in misty rain and fog. Ponds are full of grass; frogs croak melodiously.” The poems reflect the continuous rainy climate in the late spring and early summer in Jianghuai region of China. In that period, plums in the south of the Yangtze River mature, so the rain is also called as “plum rain”.

3.5 Seasons in Shi Su's Poems

Shi Su was fond of nature. He traveled to magnificent rivers and mountains of the motherland all his life, and found the differences between the north and the south of China. Several poems reflect his reflection on weather, climate, phenology and other natural phenomena. In *Quatrain in Huizhou*, he wrote, “it is spring all the year round in the Luofu Mountain. There are fresh asparagus and yellow plums every day.” It reflects that the south of China is hot all year round. The four seasons are like spring, and fresh fruits are continuous. *Ship Wind* said, “in the second half of early July, when the southeast monsoon prevails, the Plum Rain period ends.” It tells the date of Meiyu weather in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River. In the poem *New Town Road*, he extols the scenery of fields in spring. In *Visiting Two Monks During a Tour in Mountain*, the first sentence is “the sky is about to snow, the clouds are all over the lake. The buildings and mountains are clear and obscure from time to time”. It describes the gloomy weather before snowing in winter.

In ancient poetry, the description of weather is brilliant, which helps us to find the unique charm of the integration of science and literature.[4]

4. All Things in Heaven and Earth Coexist Harmoniously

Harmonious coexistence of all things in the world is the way for ancient Chinese to get along with nature. The enlightened ecological consciousness of the ancients is not only reflected in the praise and closeness to the green mountains and rivers, but also in the intimacy and care for all kinds of animals in nature. The *Spring Trip to Qiantang Lake* of Juyi Bai wrote, “from the north of Gushan Temple to the west of Jiating, the lake was just flat with the dike, and the white clouds hung low. A few early orioles compete for flying to sunny trees, who a new swallow busy nest carrying mud. A bewildering array of flowers was opening, the grass barely covering the hoofs. My favourite lake east scenery is endless, willow trees in the shade through a white sand embankment.” It shows the scene of early spring and reflects the attitude and concept of protecting wild animals advocated by the ancients. “The autumn river shares a scenic hue with the vast sky; The evening glow parallels with a lonely duck to fly”. For the Tang Dynasty poet Bo Wang, the *Preface To Poems in Tengwang Pavilion* is very popular. Qiji Xin, a poet in the Southern Song Dynasty, wrote in his poem *Moon On The West River: A Journey In Huangsha Road At Night*, “the moon on the horizon rose above the trees and startled the magpies from their perch. The cool night wind seemed to carry the sound of cicadas far away. In the fragrance of the rice flowers, people were talking about the harvest year, and they heard the sound of frogs.” There is also a poem, *To Jiushan Monk* written by Jian Wang, a poet of the Tang Dynasty, that “dogs are frightened by deer in the mountain; but fish is not afraid of people on the pond surface”. He also wrote, “I begged for the wounded geese and fish for hunters and fishermen” in that poem, which clearly praises the behaviour of loving animals and saving lives.

The ancient Chinese pursued the harmonious coexistence of heaven and earth, and advocated loving animals and saving lives. In the Western Zhou Dynasty, the rulers put the investigation and protection of the living environment into the scope of official inspection. The *Rites of Zhou: Local Officials* made it clear that the duty of Dasitu was to investigate the ecological status of animals and plants, analyze their relationship with local residents, and protect animals, mountains, forests and rivers. The aim is to make animals reproduce normally and maintain a good state, and finally make people live in a good ecological environment. In Han Dynasty, it was forbidden to destroy bird nests and kill birds in spring and summer. *The Book of Han: Emperor Xuandi* records that emperor Xuandi of Han Dynasty issued an imperial edict, declaring that the bird's nest should not be destroyed in spring and summer. Stealing bird eggs and shooting flying birds were also forbidden. In a Han Dynasty site excavated in Dunhuang, *The Imperial Edict Of Emissary And Central Inspection Office In Four Seasons* was written on a whole wall. Among them, there is an “Order of Early Spring”, which forbids the destruction of bird's nest, and even the empty nest is not allowed to be destroyed. If there are birds and eggs in the nest, destruction is prohibited throughout the year. The rule of not killing young birds takes effect throughout the year. In the Ming Dynasty, Zhi Li, a thinker, advocated vegetarianism and against fur. He criticizes in *Outline of History Criticism*, “once upon, human beings were not strong enough to compete with animals. Therefore, they could kill and eat animals if necessary. Now animals are not our enemy, there is no need for us to eat meat and sleep with their fur.” It means that in ancient times, human beings suffered from the cruelty of wild animals. In order to defend themselves and survive, the sage approved us to “eat animal flesh raw and drink its blood”. But now the animals have no strength to fight with human beings, why do we have to eat their meat and use their fur? This passage can be regarded as the earliest declaration of advocating vegetarianism and resisting wearing fur in ancient China.

5. Conclusion

At present, ecological literature is in the ascendant. It is the ultimate concern of ecological literature to set

heart for heaven and earth. When a society consciously takes nature as its friend, the development and change of natural ecology will directly affect the process of society. Therefore, literature will naturally bring the level of ecological development into its own vision. The value of ecological literature with the theme of ecology, development and construction is bound to play a bigger role than literature. It plays an active role in promoting natural environment protection and improving the relationship between man and nature. It will exert positive and subtle influence on readers in adopting the scientific outlook on development as well as the green and harmonious ecological ethics. Therefore, excellent ecological literature is a kind of action literature with realistic orientation and long-term significance.

Man and ecology are inseparable. Ecology is the need of human existence, the necessity of life, and the foundation of life. Ecological literature is also the study of human beings, and a literary style closest to human beings. Ecology and literature can be perfectly unified in human beings and serve people. In fact, when people concern and love ecological literature, they are concerned about human survival and human themselves.

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