

The Political Intention of Emperor Huizong to Mourn the Concubines

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ABSTRACT. Empress Minda was one of hui zong's favorite concubines, they had three sons and three daughters. There was a story, which spread in people, about Empress Mingda planted plantain. So, this article mainly reviews a series of memorial activities held for Empress Mingda by hui zong and figures out the reason why she planted plantain based on the meaning of plantain in song dynasty. In conclusion, It is believed that hui zong's memorial events may have been intended to create a benevolent and loyal image of himself.

KEYWORDS: Emperor hui zong, Empress mingda, Benevolent emperor

1. Introduction

Foreword: As the king of subjugation, Emperor Huizong appeared in all kinds of works with negative images. *The Story of Emperor Huizong*, written by Professor Patricia Buckley Ebrey, an American historian, describes the story of Emperor Huizong from a new perspective, positioning Emperor Huizong as an “artist emperor” and “expressing more sympathy for him”. This article also, “from the perspective of Emperor Huizong to observe his world”[1], investigate the implied meaning of the plantain planted by Empress Mingda and Emperor Huizong's mourning activities. It is believed that Emperor Huizong's mourning for the Empress Mingda is not only to memorize her, but also to shape his loyal image.

2. Planting Plantain by Empress Mingda

Hui zong's concubines were influenced by his hobbies, like painting and calligraphy. Under that circumstances, they enjoyed leisure time by dressing themselves, working with plants and amid a cloud of incense, so Hui zong made an smart impression on them.

We can learn about the life of hui zong's concubines through his palace poems: The color of the concubine's skin is as same as pink peaches, and the texture is as warm as white jade. She wears a beautiful long skirt, which flutters with her step. Concubines are very handsome and talented, thre love to read ancient poetry and always create new hair styles and make-up. The slim figure of concubines is very suitable for soft dresses.

Most of the concubines are very leisurely. Through the windows of the pavilion, you can see the scene of the concubines playing chess. Meanwhile, Huizong had romantic relationships with his concubines and got several of them preganant in the same year, so he had so many offsprings.

However, for the lack of detailed historical records of it, It is difficult to know whether their peaceful life was ture or not.

But there is one thing we can sure about hui zong's concubines were learned and shared the same interests with him.

Therefore, It was natural for Empress Mingda to dress or work with plants. Nonetheless, was plant plantain just a expression of her likes when she was in poor health? Hence, this is the point I want to explain.

In the Song Dynasty, plantain has three meanings: Firstly, it was a courtyard landscape related to the gloom and sad feelings; Secondly, it was “plantain in snow”related to the free will; Thirdly, it was a zen-”Our body just like a plantain, many a fine dishes nothing on it”

Plantain often appeared with rocks in the picture as a ordinary plants in the courtyard of Song Dynasty, such as Sunyi's *High Mountains*, Li Gonglin's *The White Lotus Society*, anonymous's *Children play under the plantain*, Zhao Boxiao's *The palace of han dynasty*, anonymous's *Children Play in dragon-boat festival*.

Scenery likes raindrops drummed rhythmically against the plantain leaves, which is being depicted in song poems, to convey a remote sentiment. For example: In Song Dynasty, there are a lot of situations of rain beating plantain, which is a typical sad scene.

In addition to creating the scene of “rain beating plantain”, there are also many meanings of seasons changing and time passing, such as: Time flies, people will get older with the disappearance of time, cherry will mature and banana will grow as time passing. [2]

The allusion of “plantain in the snow” originates from the painting *yuan an lying in the snow* by Wang Wei. “The scene of plantain in the snow is a natural expression of his artistic emotion and creative inspiration. This method of painting creation is different from secular painter. It is an expression of painter's nature and a tacit combination of them. For general public, this method is hard to understand.” [3]

In the eyes of Song people, the allusion of “plantain in the snow” advocates that art creators should not be limited to depicting the shape and color of objects, but to express their creative feelings and thoughts.

In addition, plantain is related to Zen. Such as: The quiet hills have clean soil for plantains growing. There is no idea of right and wrong, which may achieve the real purpose of life. [4] Plantains will wither after they bear fruit, as all living beings in the world. For example, people get older and finally die after they have children.

Just like plantain, it will wither after bearing fruit, and all kinds of creatures in the world will follow this rule. [5] The human body is just a pair of leather bags like plantain, which is empty. [6] According to the explanation of monk Seng Zhao, plantains are linked with people, implying that the human body and mind are not “solid”, every man has his own life, destiny to get old and die, everything is uncertain.

As a result, in Song Dynasty poetry and painting, plantain was not only a common ornamental garden plant, but also a literary image with rich meaning: the sadness of time flies, the pursuit of freedom, the destiny to birth and die.

In a word, the activity of planting was a daily life of Emperor Huizong's concubines. But, it's not an accident that Empress Mingda chose plantains. She used it as a gentle hint to show that her time was running out, and lamented “plantains will continue to grow. I can't see how they grow.”.

Plantain has become the source of the song, which is created to mourn over Empress Mingda's death, and this song was just a part of the activities that Huizong did for Mingda empress.

3. A Series of Mourning Activities of Emperor Huizong to Empress Mingda

In 1113, an incident happened in the palace, which made Emperor Huizong so sad: Liu Mingda, his favorite concubine, died. Emperor Huizong immersed in great pain, so he raised Liu Mingda as empress and wrote several poems to remember her.

After the death of empress Mingda, plantain has become the image of Huizong's memory of her.

Empress Mingda planted plantains in the courtyard before her death, and said, “plantains will continue to grow. I can't see how they grow.”. It was going to be a prophecy if she passed away while plantains were still alive and growing. Empress Mingda was ill when she planted plantains, maybe she knew that so she said the prophecy.

Empress Huizong had wrote a poem in a painting called *maid in the shade of plantains*: The expensive boots with fragrance are dangling on the soft fabric. Jade hairpins are scattered on the ground. The women's hair bun looks black and bright because of sweat. The feeling of love between men and women grows as fast as plantain leaves, and women are as shy as Double flower when they fall in love with a handsome guy. [7]

Firstly, it can be seen from the words “expensive boots”, “feeling of love” and “Double flower”, the poem describes the scene which men and women love to play. The meaning of plantain in the poem is rapid growth. Since the death of Empress Mingda, “plantains” in the poems turn to sadness and sorrow.

In order to express his deep love for Empress Mingda, Emperor Huizong made a guide song for her: Empress Mingda has good look, proper manner, gentle character and kind heart. Empress Mingda once lived a happy life in the pavilion, however, all the good times become the past with the autumn wind at night, only the delicate feather fans are left. A grand and solemn funeral was held, and gorgeous decorations were made around the statue. When spring comes again, only plantain faces the clear sky. [8] The Plantain in the guiding song does not mean the growth, instead, it is the Empress Mingda. When spring comes again, empress Mingda has already not there, only the warm spring wind blows the plantain planted by Empress Mingda.

Secondly, several years after the death of Empress Mingda, Emperor Huizong was still immersed in grief and met with her through Taoist magic.

Cai Tae mentioned in a memorial that he once asked Wang Laozhi, a Taoist, about Empress Mingda. Wang Laozhi explained that empress Mingda was a figure in Taoism: the first emperor of Shangzhen Zixu, and Laozhi used Taoism to help Huizong transmit messages to Empress Mingda. [9]

Lin lingsu, a Taoist, also helped Empress Huizong to communicate with Empress Mingda. Lin lingsu once set up a dip altar one night, and then called Empress Mingda as “flying talisman”. When the queen appeared in front of the emperor, she was like the emperor's official appearance. He said to the Hui Zong, “the emperor's concubine was a master of the emperor, because of the meeting of God's night, he thought that he had offended the world and was already banished.”[10]

Finally, Emperor Huizong's spoiled and reward Liu, the sister of Queen Mingda.

According to Emperor Huizong, Liu “inherits the code of conduct of empress Mingda” and alleviates the pain and nostalgia caused by Empress Mingda's death. Liu Mingjie was also favored by Huizong, and she was very clever and considerate. A Taoist, once said to Huizong that Liu Mingda was a Taoist figure: Jiuhua jade Princess Zhen'an. “Whenever Liu creates a new style of clothing, people will imitate it.”[11]

Cai Jing once met Liu Mingjie at yuzhenxuan in 1119. Unfortunately, the good times did not last long. Liu Mingjie died in 1121, and Empress Huizong fell into the pain of losing his wife again. In order to expressed his love for Liu , Emperor Huizong recorded him as the queen.

In order to alleviated the pain of missing, Empress Huizong once asked Lin lingsu, a Taoist, for help. Lin lingsu used Taoism to help Empress Huizong meet with the Empress Mingjie.

In a word, through a series of mourning activities, such as making a guide song, meeting with her by means of Taoism, and loving Liu Mingda, we can see the love of Emperor Huizong for Empress Mingda.

It is worth noting that why did Emperor Huizong continue to mourn empress Mingda, just in love with her?

4. The Political Intention of Huizong's Memorial Activities

First of all, it is a rare political ceremony with complicated etiquette and high cost. [12]

Two months after the death of empress Mingda, Emperor Huizong made her queen. As we all know, when the concubines died, the emperor would generally promote their first rank and then bury them, but Huizong did not adopt this way. Instead, they were Queen after two months, which was not regulated. Liu was originally the imperial concubine, after death, she should be rewarded as the imperial concubine. However, Emperor Huizong directly awarded the empress that can be seen the Emperor Huizong loved her very much.

The rulers of all dynasties paid great attention to all kinds of political rituals. As the host of large-scale rituals, the rulers mainly publicized their supremacy. “Rulers have been trying for thousands of years to support their authority and arouse the enthusiasm of the public to support their policies by designing and using rituals and inspiring their emotions.” [13]

The behavior of emperor's that reward for the dead concubines after death was not only brings glory to the concubines' family but also reflects the “unbearable benevolence” of the concubines. After the death of the empress of the Ming Festival, Emperor Huizong took the same measures of mourning: to honor her as the empress, and to meet her by Taoism.

It can be seen that the purpose of performing this kind of political ceremony again is not only to show Empress Huizong's nostalgia for the deceased concubines but also to shape his image of benevolent monarch.

Secondly, Emperor Huizong himself made the guiding song with plantain, which implied Empress Mingda, to follow queen Mingda's last wish to love Liu.

Empress Huizong is good at writing poems, especially those used in Taoist prayer. Some of his poems are still used in Taoist fasting. Empress Huizong personally made the guiding song for Empress Mingda, and took the painlain as the poetic image of Empress Mingda. This measure is very simple for Empress Huizong, but it also reflects the importance of Empress Huizong to Empress Mingda. To dote on Liu reflects that Emperor Huizong obeys the wishes of Empress Mingda and embodies the duties and obligations that should be performed as a husband.

Finally, Empress Huizong met with the Empress Mingda with the Taoist magic.

Empress Huizong believed in Taoism and often communicated with Lin lingsu, Liu Laozhi and other Taoists. After several years of Empress Mingda's death, Emperor Huizong still yearned for her and met her with Taoism. Similarly, after Empress Minglian's death, Emperor Huizong met with Empress Mingjie with Taoism. Empress Huizong fully embodies his loyalty and nostalgia, which are the virtues of gentlemen.

In a word, a series of mourning activities of Emperor Huizong for Empress Mingda not only embody his responsibility as a husband, but also shape his image of loyalty and nostalgia.

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