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Sadness and Loneliness: The Female Mood Expressed in the Work of Li Qingzhao

Li Qingzhao is one of the most famous poets in Song Dynasty. People would generally think that the fame of her is resulted, of course, mainly from her creation of a lot of beautiful works. But I am afraid that her unique female identity also contributes to her public recognition. As we all know, the general prejudice against females in feudal social systems in which Qingzhao lived led to few opportunities for women to receive education, which resulted in very little literature created by female authors; therefore, the literature achievements of Qingzhao have surprised and impressed her readers of both genders, and people have regarded her with great admiration. As Zhu Xi once said: " The women who could read and write, are only known as Li Yian (Li Qingzhao) and Mrs. Wei. (本朝妇人能文，只有李易安与魏夫人。) (Zhuzi Yulei, 1987, Juan 140)", it is clear that the rareness of female poem writers is probably one of the most compelling reasons why Qingzhao and her works stand out in the historical context of later Chinese literature. This observation gives us the inspiration that when studying the literature of Li Qingzhao, we need to keep in mind the differences between the gender characteristics of men and women reflected in her work. In fact, it seems that it is exactly Qingzhao 's unique female perspectives in writing and rendering her feelings of life that caused the formation of her unique writing features and styles. And of all the characteristics of female ,what seems most prominently reflected in her work is her desolated feeling of sadness and loneliness .

When the powerful northern kingdom Jin invaded Song, civilians of Song including Qingzhao, moved to the southern part of China due to the failure of Song's defense. After Qingzhao settled down, she wrote in the Southern Song: "Up in heaven the star-river turns, in man's world below curtains are drawn. A chill comes to pallet and pillow, damp with tracks of tears...The same weather as in times before, the same old dress —only the feelings in the heart are not as they were before.(天上星河转，人间帘幕垂。凉生枕簟泪痕滋，...旧时天气旧时衣，只有情怀，不似旧家时) (An anthology of, 1996, p.581-582)." As can be interpreted directly from the song: In a quiet autumn night, Qingzhao looked up into the Milky Way with her tear running down off her face, and then asked herself: why the weather is still like the past and the cloth she's wearing is still the same, but the mood of that day is so different from all kind of her previous feelings? In certain sense, the information from the Southern Song shows that the different emotions shown in the contents of Qingzhao's poems arise from the variation of her life circumstances. Actually, it takes only a rough looking at the atmosphere of the autumn night and the scene of her wandering around can the reader perceive the much desolated feeling of such lonely woman. What is interesting was that Qingzhao wrote explicitly in the poem :“ only the feelings in the heart are not as they were before.(只有情怀，不似旧家时)”, but does this mean that the feeling of her was never lonely before she came down from the north? My answer is no.

For a woman living in a feudal society, especially a woman who is rather talented but sentimental, the combination of the social condition of her time, her wisdom, and her personality world almost inevitably designated her to live a life full of loneliness and sorrow. In other word, just as Bo Juyi described the beauty of Yang Yuhuan in the Song of Lasting Pain as “Heaven begets beautiful things, it is loath to let them be wasted. (天生丽质难自弃)(An Anthology of, 1996, p.442)”, the origin of the desolated emotion of Qingzhao (and other talented women in

feudal society) was indeed something inborn and hard to eliminate. Hence, the innate mood of Qingzhao is unlikely to be changed due to the situation of whether she had moved to the south or she was still in the north, and the detailed reasons can be explored in the following aspects.

Women in feudal societies are basically excluded from social life, and their daily social networks are very limited, and the “occupations” of most women are restricted in raising their children and manage the household. But the situation of Qingzhao was actually a little bit different. According to the story told in her Epilogue to *Records on Metal and Stone*, after she first married her husband Zhao Mingcheng, she once went to the Temple Xiangguo to purchase books with him. Later, during the time she and Mingcheng were living in the countryside of Qingzhou, she engaged in the work of collating classic books and categorizing antique, and completed the massive academic monograph *Records on Metal and Stone*. Her experiences were not largely shared by other women in the feudal Song Dynasty, and it may seem like that life of Qingzhao was less boring than most of her counterparts. However, fundamentally speaking, the public identity of Qingzhao still remained as “the daughter of Li Gefei” or the “Wife of Zhao Mingcheng”(An Anthology of, 1996, p.591), and even these two identities only appeared in very limited social occasions. Therefore, Qingzhao did not own a separate personal status for herself and the social circle of her life must be still narrow. In fact, her writing of “How deep is the courtyard? the window is the cloud and the temple is the fog. (庭院深深深几许? 云窗雾阁常扃) (Appreciation of, 1992, p.29)”; “The cold small building, with long night and falling curtain(小楼寒, 夜长帘暮低垂) (Appreciation of, 1992, p.62)”; “Leisure in the courtyard windows in the deep vibrant spring, unfold curtains left heavy shadows (小院闲窗春色深, 重帘未卷影沉沉 (Appreciation of, 1992, p.112) ” all reveal the limitation of her living space, and the drastically suppressed talents and emotions of her.

Nevertheless, as such a talented woman, the thoughts of Qingzhao can by no means suffer the imprisoning of staying in limited space all day. Such limitation eventually invoked her desire of “flying” out of the besieged cage, but unfortunately, such desire could only be fulfilled in her dream. She dreamed in her *Free-spirited Fisherman*: “Billowing clouds touch sky and reach the early morning fog, the river of stars is ready to set, a thousand sails dance, ...Into strong winds ninety thousand miles upward the Peng now flies. (天接云涛连晓雾，星河欲转千帆舞，...九万里风鹏正举)。(Anthology of, 1996, p.582-583)” In her dream, she ride on the wind and drove thousands of miles flying in the vast sky, but after she woke up, what remained to her was still the inner negative feeling of loneliness and the boredom. In light of this, how could Qingzhao not feel lonely and sad and how could she confine the acute feelings without write them down?

On the other hand, Qingzhao had a quite happy marriage and family life. Her husband Mingcheng was very congenial with her, and at the early stage of their marriage, the couple happily went to the market together (An Anthology of, 1996, p.592). Later in *The Temple of Guilai*, they together cooperated in organizing literature works and spent their spare time tasting tea, drinking wine. Regarding a marriage life of this, Qingzhao was very satisfied and once wrote in her writing “Was very willing to be with his husband until old (甘心老是乡矣) (An Anthology of, 1996, p.592)”. It seems that the happy marriage should at least placate some of Qingzhao’s sadness and loneliness from other aspects of her life. Actually, this is not the case. Her husband Mingcheng was a government official’s child with a career involving continuous ups and down. Since Mingcheng had his own career to take care of, the separation between him and Qingzhao was very often. In Qingzhao’s poem *Sorrow of Departure*, she wrote “Who can take a letter beyond the clouds? Only the wild geese come back, and write their ideograms. On the sky under

the full Moon that floods the West Chamber. ..., Creatures of the same species Long for each other. But we are far apart and I have Grown learned in sorrow. Nothing can make it dissolve and go away. One moment, it is on my eyebrows. The next, it weighs on my heart. (云中谁寄锦书来? 雁字回时, 月满西楼,...一种相思, 两处闲愁。此情无计可消除, 才下眉头, 却上心头。) (Appreciation of, 1992, p.17)". The poem describes her strong emotion of missing Mingcheng and the sadness of geological separation from him, and keeps depicting her feeling of loneliness throughout the lyrics.

Moreover, women in feudal societies, especially whom are the wives of government courtiers, are often faced with the crisis of marriage or love. Take Song Dynasty as an example. At that time, it was very common for men to have multiple wives and concubines, and even visiting brothels was not regard as too disgrace. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that women's fear of their husband falling love with other women or being disloyal was also natural and common. Although there is no direct historical evidence of the emotional crisis between Qingzhao and her husband, The possibility that Qingzhao's feeling of loneliness and sorrow were partly brought by the anxiety and thinking of the possible disloyalty of her husband is not implausible. Hence, the physical separations of the couple and the engendered uncertainty and anxiety at least helped constitute another layer of the desolated feeling of Qingzhao.

Finally, Qingzhao's female temperament is another unignorable factor that forms her style of writing. The basic condition for any person to become an excellent poet is not only a skillful technical writing ability, but also the sentimental psychological feature to sensitively appreciate the very subtle change of their surroundings. Qingzhao sufficiently possessed the abilities to write poems as well as a strong sentimental psychological character, which can be largely attributed to her female gender. In general, compared with men, women have both weaker

physical and psychological characters. Chinese traditionally divide the philosophical power of nature into "yang (阳)" (masculine and powerful) and "yin (阴)" (feminine and delicate). Therefore, the sensation of female is generally regarded as more mild and gentle than male. In feudal society such as Song Dynasty, because the social space of female was small and the content of life was rather unexciting, female tend to develop meticulous attentions to the emotional state of their own lives, which often produce self-pity and complaint from the closed state of mind. As a result, the natural changing of seasons, the bloom and wither of flowers, or even a drizzle, a whiff of wind will invoke their deep sadness regarding the transitory feature of living matters. Correspondingly in Qingzhao's work, she devoted many efforts to portray trivial and subtle things in her life. For example: "The pity of the passing spring ends with several raindrops of rain that gives blossoms (惜春春去，几点催花雨) (Appreciation of, 1992, p.88)"; "The dream in my brain disturbed by the fragrance from the coldness of the pine, I face to the glowing candle after I wake up (瑞脑香消魂梦断，辟寒金小髻鬟松，醒时空对烛花红。) (Appreciation of, 1992, p.91)"; "The light of spring eats up the sky, the fog gives up and vanished from the surface of water (淡荡春光寒食天，玉炉沉水袅残烟) (Appreciation of, 1992, p.92)." were all motivated by her melancholy hidden bitterness about her life, and these are also the revelation of her intrinsic desolated emotion.

So overall, even in the first half of life of Qingzhao when she was still in the northern part of China, her emotion life and her feeling of desolated sorrow and loneliness were always with her and never changed, and it was exactly such constant feeling combining with her talent, her experience and her female identity that had inspired many of her great work portraying loneliness and sadness. The study of Qingzhao's work is important because the psychological feature of Qingzhao is widely shared by many other women poets in other stage of Chinese literature

history, and the exploration of the sources of Qing Zhao's psychological feature will be very helpful to our understanding of the literatures created by other female poets in feudal systems.

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