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Deng Meng

Sichuan Changjiang Vocational College, 2398314417@qq.com

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On Chengzhai Poetic Style and Shu Culture

Deng Meng*

Sichuan Changjiang Vocational College

Abstract: Yang Wanli, a renowned poet of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279 AD), has left an indelible mark on the history of Chinese literature with his unique artistic style. He pioneered the Chengzhai Poetic Style, a unique approach characterized by simplicity, naturalness, freshness, and liveliness in poetic creation. This style marked a turning point in the development of Song poetry and exerted a profound influence on the subsequent trends of Song poetry. As such, he was hailed as a “Leader in Poetry” by his contemporaries. The Chengzhai Poetic Style was gradually formed during Yang’s creation course, under the influence of several important factors, including the Bashu culture and its aesthetic taste represented by Zhang Jun and Zhang Shi, the Zen philosophy that emphasizes liveliness prevailing in the Shu area, and the view that the “Chinese Yi-ology has its roots in the Shu area.” Meanwhile, in the *Collected Works of Chengzhai (Chengzhai Ji)*, there are many poems and essays about the Bashu area, which have provided valuable feedback to the Bashu literature and enriched its content.

Keywords: Yang Wanli, Southern Song Dynasty, “Leader in Poetry,” Chengzhai Poetic Style, Shu Culture

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* Deng Meng, Sichuan Changjiang Vocational College.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Deng Meng, Sichuan Changjiang Vocational College, Chengdu, Sichuan, 610066, China. Email: 2398314417@qq.com

Who Was the Leading Figure in Poetry during the Southern Song Dynasty

Yang Wanli is a renowned poet of the Southern Song Dynasty, who is also known as Yang Tingxiu and Yang Chengzhai. Chengzhai was the name Yang Wanli gave to his study room, which meant a sincere and dedicated place. During the Southern Song Dynasty, a shift occurred in Chinese literature, especially in poetic style. Notable poets such as Yang Wanli, Lu You, Fan Chengda, and You Mao emerged simultaneously, whose innovative works gave them the reputation of the “Four Masters in Poetry During the Southern Song Dynasty.” These poets together led the way for new trends in Chinese poetry. Among them, the Chengzhai Poetic Style created by Yang Wanli, which features vivid and lively natural phenomena as its primary aesthetic object, has emerged as a pivotal point in the evolution of the Song poetry style.^① Zhu Xi, in his *A Collection of Conversations of Master Zhu (Zhuzi Yulei)*, stated that “During the Song Dynasty (960–1279), the Jiangxi poetry underwent several transformations—from the works of Huang Tingjian to the pioneering contributions of Yang Wanli, and continued to evolve, eventually forming a dominant and influential poetic style in Chinese literature history.” These lines indicated that Jiangxi poetry was the predominant style during the Song Dynasty, and that Huang Tingjian corrected maladies found in poetry while Yang Wanli introduced innovations in poetic style, contributing greatly to the vitality of Jiangxi poetry over a long period. Academic circles hold the view that Yang Wanli’s poetic innovations and transformative efforts paved the way for the emergence of the “Four Spirits in Yongjia” (represented by Zhao Shixiu, Weng Juan, Xu Linghui, and Xu Ji), as well as the Jianghu School of Poetry and the Poetry School of Nature and Inspiration prevailing during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD) and the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912 AD). Therefore, many of his contemporaries recognized him as the “Leader in Poetry” and acknowledged his significant contributions to artistic innovation. For instance, Jiang Teli, a close associate of Yang Wanli, once provided an exact commentary on Yang’s poetic prowess as evidenced by his verses, “I have long admired Yang Wanli’s renown in the poetry circle. Much more, I frequently had the privilege of hearing him expound upon poetry in person. His poetry is on par with that of Huang Tingjian, rendering it superfluous for people to venerate the works of Bai Juyi from a preceding epoch. There are currently too many long poems, with lengthy lines prevalent throughout. Who is the leader in today’s poetry world? The Chengzhai Poetic Style is gaining momentum” (*Expressing Gratitude to Yang Chengzhai for His Long Poem*). Xiang Anshi, a scholar who previously served as Controller-General

^① The quotations of Yang Wanli cited in this article are all derived from the *Annotation to the Collection of Yang Wanli*, annotated by Xin Gengru. This work was published by Zhonghua Book Company in 2007.

of Chongqing, said that, “Although I have not met Yang Wanli in person, I am able to comprehend the implications embodied in his poems.” He regarded Yang Wanli as a confidant and praised him by saying, “Yang Wanli’s poetry is unparalleled throughout history. His innovative poetic style is unique and prevalent in our time” (*Inscription to Yang Chengzhai’s Poems Collected by Liu Dugan*). Additionally, he remarked that, “Yang Wanli is a man of great erudition whose poems can be found everywhere in the country” (*To Yang Wanli*). Later, Wang Mai expressed his admiration for Yang Wanli’s poetry in his poem *Reading Chengzhai’s Poems in the Mountains*, saying, “Amidst countless poems and rhymes, Chengzhai’s verses shine as the most sublime.” Li Hong, who once served as the Transport Commissioner of Zizhou, remarked, “Through memorials, Hu Zhongjian’s talent blooms. In poetry, Yang Chengzhai leads the rooms.” Even Lu You, a friend of Yang Wanli who later gained greater fame, once commented with modesty, “Writings can be good or bad, with opinions just and fair. Compared to Chengzhai’s works, my own works pale in comparison” in his poem *Gratitude for Supervisor Wang Zilin’s Preface to My Poetry Collection*. He admitted, “In poetry circles, Chengzhai leads the fray. A fact recognized publicly without delay.” When commenting on various poems in his *Canglang Poetry Talks (Canglang Shihua)*, Yan Yu only extolled Yang Wanli for his Chengzhai Poetic Style among the poets of the Southern Song Dynasty. Liu Qi of the Yuan Dynasty, in Volume 8 of his *Records from a Return to Obscurity (Guiqian Zhi)*, stated that Li Zhichun, who previously held the position of Transport Commissioner in Chengdu prefecture and fostered a close relationship with Huang Tingjian, expressed great admiration for Yang Wanli’s poetry in his later years. He remarked that “Chengzhai’s poetry is full of liveliness, and no one can compare with him.” In the Yuan Dynasty, Ouyang Xuan documented the aesthetic trend of poetry during a specific period, stating that “Yang Wanli served as a pioneer in new-style poems after the Song Dynasty relocated its capital to the south, and many scholars followed suit.”

Yang Wanli’s poetic innovation abandoned the traditional bookish worship and the stereotypical approach of employing allusions to convey profound meanings. He endeavored to break away from the constraints of the Jiangxi School of Poetry, thus introducing a new aesthetic concept full of “freshness and liveliness” into the poetry circle of the Southern Song Dynasty. Although occasionally infused with slang, the artistic conception of his poetry remains refined and elegant. His description of the scenery is more than wonderful. Qian Zhongshu stated in his *Selected Commentaries on Song Poems* (1957), “During his time, Yang Wanli played a pivotal role in the transformation of poetry. His introduction of a fresh and lively writing style made the styles of Lu You and Fan Chengda seem conservative or stagnant.” “Obviously, Yang Wanli intended to employ the ethereal and sprightly verses of the late Tang Dynasty as a remedy to alleviate the inherent malady of the Jiangxi School of Poetry.” He also compared the poetic characteristics of

Yang Wanli and Lu You (also known as Lu Fangweng) in the Chapter “Appreciation of Chengzhai’s Poems” in his *Notes on Art (Tan Yi Lu)*, stating that “painting landscapes suitable for painting and composing poems with events suitable for poetry will enhance the quality of a work, achieving twice the result with half the effort, although it does not pertain to techniques for exploring new territories or deriving inspiration from natural beauty. Chengzhai and Fangweng were equally skilled in the art of poetry writing. Fangweng excelled in depicting phenomena with greater elegance and extracting fresh implications from the past. In contrast, Chengzhai had a unique ability to describe things in a way that others had not yet explored and was skilled at making the unfamiliar feel familiar. Fangweng excelled in portraying picturesque landscapes, whereas Chengzhai was adept at capturing the essence of life through his brushstrokes. Fangweng’s poetic style resembled the delicate brushstrokes of a painting, while Chengzhai’s was akin to the instantaneous capture of photography. Chengzhai excelled at seizing fleeting moments that were yet undistinguished and those on the cusp of change but not yet changed, such as leaping rabbits, diving falcons, soaring kites, and jumping fish with keen eyesight and nimble hands.” These ideas came from Qian Zhongshu’s father, Qian Jibo. Qian Jibo stated in Chapter IV “The Southern Song Dynasty” of the “Modern and Ancient Literature (II)” in Volume V of the *History of Chinese Literature*, a work completed in 1939, that “Yang Wanli and Lu You are the most distinguished poets of the Southern Song Dynasty, whose works have been widely disseminated to this day. Lu You’s poetry is distinguished by its fresh and gentle descriptions, which convey a mellow artistic conception. His artistic achievements are considered comparable to those of Su Shi. Yang Wanli’s fresh and delicate descriptive style is derived from the influence of Huang Tingjian.” “Yang was good at exhibiting unexpected elements through clear descriptions. He was adept at conveying complex concepts in a simplistic manner and tried to avoid depicting the familiar rather than the ordinary. With a comprehensive understanding of both past and present, he excelled at extracting new implications from history and elevating the ordinary to elegance. Yang first learned the style of Huang Tingjian before following the example of Han Yu in both poetry and essay writing. He is renowned for his poetic works.” “Yang Wanli was good at making use of his strengths to pursue a free and unrestrained writing style, while Fan Chengda tended to evade his weaknesses and avoid errors. Lu You’s words emanate a sense of joy and ease, whereas those of Yang Wanli and Fan Chengda exude a feeling of distraction and disappointment” (Qian, 2008). Wang Shuizhao provided a more concise summary of Yang Wanli’s innovative contributions in his article “Yang Wanli’s Current Significance and Literature Research of the Song Dynasty.” He noted that “Yang Wanli’s poetry is characterized by a fast, lively, and humorous rhythm as well as clear and acute observations about life. He then skillfully wove these feelings into his poems. Although Lu You was a prominent figure in his time, he failed to establish a literary or

poetic style comparable to that of Yang Wanli” (Xiao, 2009, p.1).

There exist over 4,300 extant poems authored by Yang Wanli. Yang Wanli’s poetry was inspired by the natural world and everyday life. He employed a bold syntax that centered on verbs to create poems, resulting in sentences that were fresh and natural in style, as if they were spoken spontaneously. This approach created active and flexible images, contributing to a new aesthetic style known as the Chengzhai Poetic Style that rose to prominence during the Song Dynasty. A good example is found in verses such as “Over our vast land a curved moon sheds its light. In how many houses is there joy? In how many is there gloom? Blame not the moon for our sorrows and anxieties. Relax, relax a bit whenever we can afford to.” His landscape poems are particularly intriguing due to his meticulous and profound observations, vivid depictions, and focus-like fixed frames. For example, there are verses such as “Plums leave their tartness, weakening my teeth; Banana fronds lend their green to my gauze window. On a long day, I rise listless from my nap; Idly I watch children catch willow catkins.” and “Amid the fog mountains and rivers hide from view. Only from the sound of chickens and dogs can I recognize there may be a village ahead of me. Ferryboats are blanketed with white snow, leaving a trail as I venture forth,” and “During the spring season, while raindrops descend from the sky, individuals immerse themselves in the beauty of plum blossoms and bamboo shadows.” Poems such as *A Small Pond*, *A Toddler Fiddles with Ice*, *Early Summer Waking from a Nap*, and *At an Inn in Xinshi*, which have been selected for various anthologies and primary and secondary school textbooks, all deliver lively and interesting artistic conceptions.

Yang Wanli once expressed his unwillingness to accept mediocre artistic pursuits in his *Postscript to Three Poems Recently Composed by Xu Gongzhong*, stating “I am ashamed for the tradition in poetry that adheres to stereotypical schools or styles since genuine writers possess a romantic spirit that is irreplicable. The accomplishments of Huang Tingjian and Chen Shidao ought to be surpassed, and more distinguished poets will emerge after the likes of Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun.” Yang Wanli demonstrated his view on the creation of a new poetic style in his *Reply to Letter of Lu Yibo*, stating “Poetry should indeed demonstrate elegance through the ordinary, yet we must also learn the techniques of our predecessors to establish a connection between what came before and what follows. For instance, valuable insights can be gleaned from exquisite poems such as Li Bai’s ‘The water surface of South Lake on an autumn night is limpid and free from any trace of mist. However, how can one capture its flow to ascend to heaven?’ Du Fu’s ‘After observing the wild crane for a while, I noticed that its feathers were as white as frost. It stood watch, muffling the sound of the neighboring rooster’s crowing, since there were still several hours before daybreak,’ Dai Shulun’s ‘Amidst the autumn breeze, a few delicate apricot blossoms sway in the wind, while a tipsy visitor arrives under the fragrant apricot tree,’ and Dongfang Qiu’s ‘Among the blooming plum blossoms in the garden, which is the genuine one and not a snowflake

imposter?” He further stated that “Of the three hundred most renowned Tang poems, those created during the late Tang Dynasty exhibit the highest level of artistry.” This is supported by his assertion that “When I first began writing poetry, I learned from Wang Anshi (art name Banshan). However, I soon realized that if I wished to achieve any success in this field, it was imperative for me to eventually adopt the style of the late Tang Dynasty. Few individuals possessed a comprehensive understanding of the *Book of Songs*; however, it is crucial to approach its interpretation with an unprejudiced mindset” (*Reply to Xu Zicai’s Discourse on Regulated Verses*). Yang Wanli’s unique perspective on late Tang poetry provides a significant approach to interpreting the factors contributing to the emergence of the Chengzhai Poetic Style. Luo Genze, a literary historian, posited that while others differentiated between Jiangxi poetry and late Tang poetry, Yang Wanli instead blended the two together by emphasizing their shared “flavor.” As such, his understanding of Jiangxi poetry differs significantly from his predecessors.

Shu Culture Nurtures the Chengzhai Poetic Style

The Bashu Culture, represented by the Zen philosophy that emphasizes the liveliness prevailing in the Shu area and the recognition that the “Chinese Yi-ology has its roots in the Shu area,” played an important role in the development of the Chengzhai Poetic Style. Guo Shaoyu, a literary historian, once observed that Yang Wanli’s poetic theory was imbued with the flavor of Zen philosophy. Yang Wanli did have a poem that admits his embodiment of the Zen philosophy when composing poems. This can be found in his poem *Seeing off the Outgoing Censorate of Fenning County Luo Hongcai on His Journey to Beijing*, wherein he wrote, “You see, just as Zen practitioners revere the Caoxi School of Zen Buddhism, poets imitate and hold in high esteem the Jiangxi School of Poetry. If we fail to assimilate the essence of the Nanhua and Xiushui schools of Zen Buddhism, how can we transmit and carry forward the philosophy of Zen? The same applies to poetry.” Caoxi, Nanhua, and Xiushui were the primary schools of Zen Buddhism during the Tang and Song dynasties, while the Jiangxi School of Poetry was the dominant poetic school at that time. It is worth noting that Mazu Daoyi, a renowned master of Zen Buddhism, is also known as “Jiangxi Daoyi,” indicating his status as a great poet in the Jiangxi poetic tradition. Yang Wanli’s writings on Zen Buddhism are evident in his verse, “It has been three years since our separation. To whom can I talk about poetry and Zen philosophy,” extracted from his poem *Reply to a Poem by Contemporary Judge Zhang of Liangshaozhou Prefecture*. In his poem *Two Regulated Verses Composed on a Boat under the Inspiration of a Compilation of Yang Wanli’s Poetry*, Zhang Zi, a friend of Yang Wanli, highlighted an important artistic feature of the Chengzhai Poetic Style, saying, “The creative spirit knows no bounds, leaping up and down with immediacy. While there are many poetries today, few possess the liveliness

and essence of life that define this style.” The emphasis on “liveliness” originated from Mazu Daoyi, a master of the Shu-native Zen School in the Tang Dynasty. Mazu, a native of Shifang county in Sichuan province, advocated the cultivation of the mind in an unrestricted manner. In other words, the essence of Buddhism is embodied in the mind, and one can discover the Buddha nature within oneself. The ordinary mind represents the enlightenment of Tao, allowing one to seek purity amidst life and death while enjoying the freedom of movement. Mazu introduced the theory of individual autonomy by asserting that, “Touching one thing is the same as touching the Way, for when you touch one thing deeply, you touch all things.” This theory paved the way for the development of Live Zen, a practice that is both accessible and rejuvenating. At its core, Live Zen encourages practitioners to view everyday actions such as carrying water and chopping wood as manifestations of Buddha nature, thereby fostering a vibrant experience of life.

Yang’s close associate, Zhou Bida, astutely observed a salient characteristic of Yang’s poems in his work entitled *Reply to Yang Tingxiu’s Prepared Inscription to Zhu’s Huanran Academy*, stating “Chengzhai esteemed liveliness in all endeavors, and his lively writing style has greatly enriched numerous poems of his era. Alas, I am like a small insect in a wine jar, with limited knowledge. But occasionally, I poke my head out and catch a glimpse of the sky beyond the jar.” Most scholars posit that the “liveliness” of Yang Wanli’s poetry stems from the influence of the Zhaozhou School of Zen Buddhism, as evidenced by his verse, “The syntax is indeed arduous to master, yet with diligent effort one may ultimately apprehend it. At first glance, it may appear to be a cypress tree, but upon closer observation, it could reveal itself as a branch of peach blossom” (*Two Poems with Li Tianlin*). This is based on the enlightenment of “Cypress tree before the yard” by Master Congshen of the Zhaozhou School of Zen Buddhism, as well as Master Lingyun Zhiqin’s allusion to seeing peach blossoms for enlightenment. In addition, Yang’s poems also contain various Zen expressions associated with the Zhaozhou School of Zen Buddhism, such as “drinking tea” and “cleansing alms bowls.” However, it is often overlooked by scholars that Congshen, Master of the Zhaozhou School of Zen Buddhism, who was also widely known as Zhaozhou Monk, was a disciple of Master Nanquan Puyuan and a second-generation disciple of Mazu Daoyi, an esteemed master of Zen Buddhism. His Zen philosophy directly originated from Mazu’s theory that “The essence of Buddhism is embodied in the mind, and one can discover the Buddha nature within oneself.” It can be argued that Yang Wanli’s poetic theory and the liveliness inherent in his style of poetry owe a debt to Mazu Daoyi’s lively Zen philosophy. Yang’s friend Ge Tianmin unequivocally stated in his poem *To Yang Chengzhai* that “The study of Zen philosophy and poetry creation share similarities. When well understood, even a lifeless snake can appear lively... Alive and fresh, yet not incoherent in speech, this characteristic is distinctive to Yang Chengzhai. His talents will forever remain a topic of public discourse, as his works continue to surpass the beauty of nature

with each passing season. With a unique talent and perspective, he delves into the depths of emotion and expresses them flawlessly through his poetry. Lines with Zen philosophy are always on the tip of his tongue, and he has a talent for capturing scenery reminiscent of Tao Yuanming.” Among them, the Zen philosophy of “even a lifeless snake can appear lively” originated from Zong Gao, a descendant of Master Yuanwu Keqin in Zhaojue Temple of Chengdu city and the third-generation descendant of Mazu.

However, it was his mentor who played a crucial role in triggering both his personal and artistic transformation. The name “Chengzhai” is derived from Zhang Jun, a native of the present-day Mianzhu city in Sichuan province and a renowned chancellor from the Shu area. According to the Biography of Yang Wanli in the *History of the Song*, at 34 years old, Yang Wanli held Zhang Jun in high esteem. “Zhang Jun exhorted him to pursue his studies with sincerity and dedication, which became a lifelong pursuit for Yang Wanli. As such, he named his study Chengzhai (a place for sincere and dedicated study).” He was overjoyed by his visit to Zhangjun, which he immortalized in his poem *Three Odes to Chengzhai in My Secluded Residence*. In the poem, he wrote, “Upon my return from visiting Ziyuan (Zhang Jun), I felt immense joy and beamed broadly in the spring breeze. Yesterday’s visit seemed like a dream to me, so I named my study Chengzhai.” Since then, a master-apprentice relationship had been established between Zhang Jun and Yang Wanli. Zhang Jun (style name Ziyuan) and his son Zhang Shi (style name Nanxuan), hailing from Mianzhu city in Sichuan province, played a significant role in shaping and influencing the development of the Chengzhai Poetic Style through various means. Luo Dajing documented Zhang Jun’s encouragement for Yang Wanli’s poetic innovation experiment in Volume 14 of his *Jade Dew from the Forest of Cranes (Helin Yulu)*, wherein he wrote, “When Zhang Jun saw Yang Wanli’s lines ‘On a long day I rise listless from my nap; Idly I watch children catch willow catkins,’ he remarked, ‘Tingxiu possessed an astute mind’” (Xiao, 2007). In Yang’s eyes, his mentor Zhang Jun “is a highly knowledgeable master who possesses profound insights into numerous classics such as the *Book of Changes*, *Spring and Autumn Annals*, *The Analects of Confucius* and *Mencius*. His memorials to the throne are lucid in content without any superfluous words, while his impromptu compositions are well-organized and require no revision.” With such a knowledgeable and insightful mentor to emulate, Yang was motivated and emboldened by his mentor’s commendation and validation, thus intensifying his experimentation with the Chengzhai Poetic Style. After receiving clear guidance on aesthetics from his mentor, 36-year-old Yang Wanli sorted through his existing works and burned most of his old pieces. According to the *Preface of Collection of Rivers and Lakes (Jianghu Ji)*, “During my early years, I had already composed over 1,000 poems. In July of the Renwu year during the Shaoxing Period (1162), I burned most of them as they were all written in the Jiangxi poetic style.” After receiving the title of “Chengzhai” from his mentor, it took him two years to decide between tradition and innovation, before finally embracing

the artistic guidance and correction of both his mentor and junior fellow apprentice. It was then that the Chengzhai Poetic Style began to take shape. Regarding the shift in poetic style, he explicitly stated in the *Preface to Nanhai Collection*, “I have been fond of composing poems since my early days. Initially, I admired my own work but later came to despise it. By the Renwu year during the Shaoxing Period, my poetic style began to evolve.”

Zhang Shi, the son of his mentor, was Yang’s junior fellow apprentice in terms of age. He gained nationwide recognition for his expertise in Yi-ology, as evidenced by works such as *Nanxuan’s Study on Yi-ology*. His extant poems number over 500 and wield significant influence within literary circles. His literary and artistic characteristics were expounded by Luo Dajing in his essay *Commentary on Six Poems about Chengnan*, where he noted, “...the six poems are distinguished by a leisurely yet concise style, with precise language. The virtue conveyed through them is also genuine.” The leisurely and concise linguistic and artistic features are among the defining characteristics of the Chengzhai Poetic Style. Yang clearly summarized the literary style of his junior fellow apprentice Zhang Shi in his work *Chengzhai’s Discourse on Poetry*, wherein he wrote, “Zhang Qinfu is specialized in studying Yi-ology. Although he did not intend to compose poems, every line he wrote was more than perfect. Zhang’s poetry is characterized by plain language, enduring flavor, and unique rhyme.” These words are also appropriate for summarizing the artistic characteristics of the Chengzhai Poetic Style. Zhang Shi’s influence on the artistic style of Yang Wanli’s poetry is palpable, as demonstrated by his advice to Yang Chengzhai, “At the outset, Yang Chengzhai wants to learn how to compose poems with magnificent momentum. Zhang Shi asked, ‘What is there worth learning in this? Why not learn instead how to compose poems with sincere and inspired emotions?’ Upon hearing these words, Yang Chengzhai was suddenly enlightened and resolved never again to pursue such techniques. He subsequently authored the *Contemplation on Poetry (Qian Lü Ce)*, in which he posited techniques as an unworthy pursuit in poetry creation” (Luo, 1983, p. 47). Therefore, Yang aspired to receive feedback from his junior fellow apprentice Zhang Shi, who was six years his junior, on each of his new works, as stated in the *Postscripts to Two Poems of Zhang Qinfu Collected by Yu Boyi*, which reads, “On small sheets of paper I wrote poems to convey my ideas. Every time Nanxuan would provide me with positive feedback. I made friends everywhere and communicated with them through the flow of ink.” In the poem *Fan Po Qie: Receiving Zhang Qinfu’s Responding Poem*, Yang exclaimed, “Every year I compose poems without fail, but to whom can I send these poems? I shall preserve your favorable advice within me and cherish it in my heart forever.” It can be inferred from this that he is eager to obtain greater guidance and assistance from Zhang Shi to innovate his poetic style. Fang Hui of the Yuan Dynasty included three poems by Zhang Shi on odes to plum blossom in his *Collected Lüshi Poems of the Tang and Song Dynasties (Ying Kui Lü Sui)*. He commented on Zhang Shi’s poetic style in the *Poem Composed During Plum Blossom Season While*

Drinking with My Nephew, stating, "...some of our predecessors were not specialized in poetry composition, yet they still produced magnificent lines when tackling difficult topics. This can be attributed to their inherent talent and interest in composing poetry." He also remarked on the poem *Admiring Plum Blossoms with Yuwen Zhengfu*, stating, "This poem is written in a fresh and clear language that can only be crafted by a great poet." Fang Hui asserted that these two poems were replete with natural and lively essence. These serve as excellent references for the transformation of Yang Wanli's poetic style. In addition, Zhang Shi argued against the notion of relying solely on language for deep contemplation and problem-solving in studying. Instead, he advocated a mindset of calmness, relaxation, and playfulness that involves immersion and introspection to seek the way of the sage beyond surface-level meanings in speech and language. Indeed, Yang Wanli eagerly anticipated further guidance. Zhang Shi responded in his poem *To Yang Tingxiu*, "The knowledge neglected by the ancients can be acquired, but it is far from easy to fully comprehend. With a lucid mind and unobstructed vision, one can unveil what remains veiled. In verses and poetry, most revelations have already been comprehended, and you have already captured their allure. Through the study of Confucian and Mencius classics, one can come to understand that the essence of poetry transcends mere words." Later, Yang Wanli explained in his *Preface to Chengzhai's Lecture on The Analects of Confucius*, "Understanding the meaning beyond words is essential when reading. No one can claim to be a great reader if he doesn't comprehend what is conveyed beyond words" (Xin, 2007, p. 3176).

The view that "Chinese Yi-ology has its roots in the Shu area" has been widely recognized by the public. Those who specialize in the study of Yi-ology may be influenced to some extent by the research on Yi-ology in the Shu area. The academic ideas of Chen Tuan, a prominent Yi-ology master from the Shu area in the early Song Dynasty, directly influenced and contributed to the academic achievements of the "Five Masters of Yi-ology" during that period, namely Zhou Dunyi, Shao Yong, Zhang Zai, Cheng Hao, and Cheng Yi. Later, Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi went on an academic visit to the Shu area and were dedicated to promoting the study of Yi-ology, which laid a foundation for the formation of the basic pattern for academic research in the Song Dynasty. Among the four literary masters of the Southern Song Dynasty, only Yang Wanli dedicated himself to the study of Yi-ology. The emergence of his work, *Chengzhai's Study on Yi-ology* appears to demonstrate the influence of Shu Yi-ology and his mentor Zhang Jun's masterpiece *Ziyan's Study on Yi-ology* upon him. The 20-volume *Chengzhai's Study on Yi-ology* is a masterpiece completed by Yang Wanli at the age of 62. He owed the excellence of this work to the rigorous guidance and supervision of his mentor Zhang Jun as well as the influence of his junior fellow apprentice Zhang Shi. Yang Wanli once mentioned this in his *Record of Li's Yigai Hall in Guanghan*, "I had been studying under Zhang Shi and his son since my early days." *Chengzhai's Study on Yi-ology*, which was greatly influenced by Zhang Jun's

Ziyan's Study on Yi-ology and the Shu Yi-ology, has played a vital role in the formation of his "Chengzhai Poetic Style." There are also many discussions in academic circles about the philosophical implications present in Yang Wanli's poetry.

Impact of Bashu Literature on Yang Wanli

Bashu literature played a pivotal role in Yang Wanli's literary accomplishments. As a poet, Yang Wanli was significantly influenced by writers hailing from the Shu area. This is manifested not only in the thematic selection, linguistic usage, and artistic image creation techniques of his poetry but also in his literary collection *Chengzhai's Discourse on Poetry*. Poems during the Flourishing Tang, exemplified by Li Bai and Du Fu's poems related to the Shu area, along with late Tang poems about the Shu area by "nine monks" and the conduct and writings of Su Xun, Su Shi, and Su Zhe in Meishan had a profound impact on Yang Wanli. Han Ju, a native of Renshou county in the Shu area, wrote in his work *To Zhao Boyu*, "Learning poetry is like learning Zen. At first, one seeks knowledge everywhere he can. Once enlightened, the Dharma eye opens. Verses effortlessly flow, each one aflame." He was also directly influenced by the predecessors of the Jiangxi School of Poetry. In his *Notes at Laoxuean Study*, Lu You documented the profound impact of Su Shi on the literary circle of the Song Dynasty, "since the Jianyan period of Emperor Gaozong's reign, there has been a prevailing trend of revering Su Shi's writings among scholars. Many scholars, especially those from the Shu area, were inspired by Su Shi's example. There is a saying that goes, 'If one masters Su Shi's articles well, he may enjoy delicious mutton; otherwise, he'll have to settle for plain vegetable soups.'" Yang Wanli, who grew up in such a cultural atmosphere, was inevitably influenced by this trend. Yang Wanli's verse, "The slender lotus does a small bud show; A dragonfly lights on its tip to stand," shares a similar artistic conception with Su Shi's poem *Return of the Lover in Early Summer*, which reads, "Amidst the lush locust trees and towering willow trees cicadas just cease singing. At that moment, a gentle breeze sweeps over my string. Beneath the green-hued gauze screen rises the musky smoke serene. Amidst the peaceful midday doze, sudden sounds of a chess game pose. After a light rain, little lotuses began to bloom, and so did pomegranate flowers. As her tender hands stir clear spring water, pearls of water become broken and round."

Yang Wanli held high regard and deep admiration for the rich cultural atmosphere of the Bashu area, as evidenced in his Ci poem *Gratitude for Wang Gongfu's Gift of Liang Gao Ink*. In it, he wrote, "Do you not see that the poetry of the Shu people is unparalleled in the world? From Sima Xiangru to Yang Xiong, their works are unmatched. Do you not see that the ink of the Shu people is also unrivaled? From Pu Dashao to Liang Gao, their creations stand out above all others." Originally, it was a poem composed to express gratitude for the gift of ink from a friend. However, Yang Wanli found that simply extolling the exquisite

ink-making technique of the Shu area did not fully convey his deep appreciation. Thus, he went on to praise the poetry and ink of the Shu people. He even believed that Ouyang Xiu's literary achievements were greatly influenced by his birthplace, the Bashu area, as evidenced in his poem *Proposed Inscriptions to Liuyi Hall of Mianzhou Prefectural Judge*. In the poem, he wrote, "Ouyang Xiu is a great leader of literature in his generation who hailed from the Bashu area, home to many sages." The outstanding contributions of Bashu writers in the past and the illustrious reputation of Su Xun, Su Shi, and Su Zhe during his era, served as a driving force for Yang Wanli's inclination towards communicating with the Shu people and embracing their influence in a conscious or unconscious manner. He even acquired some Sichuan dialects, such as "Laozi," a Shu dialect term for self-reference. This term is frequently present in his poems, such as "I ("Laozi") remain alone in my study, with no visitors" (*Fifty Odes to Xianglin: Study in the Mountain*), "I ("Laozi") have detached myself from worldly affairs and when it snows, I add charcoal to the stove at night by myself" (*Flaming Wood Charcoal in a Cold Night*), "As I ("Laozi") burned incense and headed home, groups of buzzing bees flew by" (*Six Improvisation Poems in Early Spring of Jiazi*), and "I ("Laozi") once owned a forest in Jiangxi, where sweet-scented osmanthus flowers bloomed amidst tens of thousands of pine trees" (*Six Poems to Reply to Zhang Gongfu As Sweet-scented Osmanthus Flowers Bloom*).

The admiration expressed by predecessors and friends towards the Shu area upon their arrival also captured Yang Wanli's aesthetic attention. Zhu Jiongyuan and Zhang Li contended in their 1992 article "On the Artistic Origin of Yang Wanli's Chengzhai Poetic Style" that the fresh, lively, and engaging aesthetic conception found in the Chengzhai Poetic Style reflected Du Fu's landscape description techniques embodied in his seven great poems about the Shu area. In his *Postscript to Lu You's Jiannan Poem Collection*, Yang Wanli also disclosed that he drew on the creative techniques of Du Fu during his poetic innovation, as evidenced in the lines, "Lu You is a leader of poetry in our generation, who possesses an innate talent for composing poetry. Revisiting the renowned poems of Zimei (Du Fu), I was inspired to create new poems. Marmosets vocalize in the Baxia Gorge on a rainy day, while the crimson blooms and jade-like river herald the arrival of spring in Jiannan. After I packed my bag, a breeze swept by, causing the semi-circular moon to sway on the western side of the sky beside my window." The "semi-circular moon" in this context alludes to the lines from Li Bai's *Song to the Moon at the Emei Mountain*, while the "rainy day in Baxia Gorge" corresponds to Li Shangyin's verse "You asked when I shall return, that I have no idea. At night, in the Ba Mountains, rain fills a pond of autumn over the brim," from his *To a Friend in the North on a Rainy Night*. In his *Chengzhai's Discourse on Poetry*, Yang Wanli extolled Du Fu's exceptional ability to depict landscapes in poetry with great admiration. He argued that Du Zimei's lines in *Ode to Wuhou Temple* and *Ode to Landscapes in the Shu Area*, such as, "In vain before the steps spring grass grows green

and long. And amid the leaves golden orioles sing their song,” and “The Tuojiang River flows through the heart of the Shu area while the Minshan Mountain lies in its north. The white waves beat against the white walls, and green mountains tower into the high sky” were genuine masterpieces that vividly depicted the picturesque landscapes of the Shu area. In addition, he suggested that “by studying the works of renowned poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian and thoroughly analyzing their techniques in creating poetry while comprehending the true meaning conveyed in their poems, one can effortlessly produce exceptional pieces.” In short, Yang Wanli, a former member of the Jiangxi School of Poetry, was heavily influenced and inspired by the works of Du Fu and Huang Tingjian, especially those about the Shu area.

Meanwhile, Yang Wanli’s poetry also exhibits indications of assimilating and dissolving certain artistic elements from the poems about the Shu area by his acquaintance Lu You and colleague Jinshi scholar Fan Chengda. Yang Wanli’s emphasis on “Revisiting the renowned poems of Zimei” in his *Postscript to Lu You’s Jiannan Poem Collection*, combined with the artistic appreciation gained from Lu You’s statement, “The secret to composing poetry lies in following examples of predecessors,” has paved the way for the innovation and shift in his poetic style. Yang Wanli was greatly influenced by the poems about the Shu area by his acquaintances Lu You and Fan Chengda. Yang frequently referenced their works on begonias in his own poetry. For example, in his *Poem Addressed to Lu Wuguan Regarding Admiration for Begonias in Intoxication*, Yang Wanli wrote, “In the park, the begonia blooms, delicate and white. Two petite chairs nestled in its sea of sight. Guimeng reclined upon one in silent ease. His black gauze cap falls not by a breeze. As the breeze sweeps by, petals dance in the air like flying snowflakes. Guimeng deftly grasps his brush to capture the scenery before him. Whether reclining or sitting upright, he exudes great charm and elegance. Drunk or sober, there is no need to ask. What an elegant picture of an elder admiring the begonia, somewhat like a picture painted by Master Wu Daozi.” His other poems about begonias include *Records of Gathering in Zhang’s North Park with Shen Yuqing, You Yanzhi, Mo Zhongqian, Lu Wuguan and Shen Zishou for Begonia Admiration*, which reads, “The east wind wafts into my tent, revealing blooming begonia that outshine the blush of a fair maiden. Rain or shine, their grace will shine forever. A perfect color scheme with white and red unfolds, with buds yet to unfurl, promising magnificence ahead. As a ray of sunshine touches down. In full bloom, they burst, like snowflakes flying from the sky. Amidst the sea of flowers, poets gathered there with teacups in hand. Intoxicated, their faces adorned with a flower hue, all immersing themselves in the breathtaking scenery.” This demonstrates his extensive knowledge and appreciation of a multitude of begonia poems authored by his acquaintances from the Shu area. In addition, Yang Wanli had a close relationship with Jing Tang, who held a prominent position in the Shu area as an official. Yang highly appreciated Jing’s poems about the Shu area, which were an essential part of his poetry

creation. Yang also wrote an essay titled “Epitaph to Wenzhong (Jing Tang),” which can be found in Volume 123 of the *Collected Works of Chengzhai*. Therefore, he was remarkably familiar with Jing Tang’s *Water Melody Themed Sima Bridge*, which reads, “In the north of the city walls of Chengdu, the Pijiang River flows far and wide, reaching up to touch the sky. The body of the bridge gracefully arches over the river, resembling a vibrant rainbow. The bridge features a splendid roof adorned with vibrant avian motifs, resting upon a robust stone foundation embellished with regal draconic designs. As I searched for the source of the river, it flowed gracefully towards the east. Sima Xiangru’s influence was formidable, surpassing that of many officials. His celebrated poetry, composed upon the Sima Bridge, captivated the attention of the emperor. I hereby propose that those who ascend the bridge carry on the legacy of our predecessors and forge ahead with even greater achievements.” Yang Wanli also appreciated *Jing Tang’s Melody of Jiangduchun Themed Ode to the Lantern Festival*, which reads, “The street was as bustling as the past. On the eve of the Lantern Festival, Jinli Street was adorned with a resplendent aura. Carriages lined up on the street, and the sweet scent of rouge wafted from within the sedan chairs, perfuming the air. The flickering flames and lanterns illuminate the dark night, just like stars scattered across the sky. Amidst the jade flute’s melody, beneath the lotus’s gilded beauty, the moon shines as bright as day. Do you know? The beauty of the scenery and the happiness of a prosperous land are rare treasures that last forever. Beside me sit two distinguished men, performing flute with grace. The captivating melody enticed numerous elegant ladies to attend. Liquors in the copper kettle are waiting for their owners to enjoy. I raise my cup to share the enchanting night with everyone on the site.” Yang Wanli also considered Yuan Shuoyou, the then Magistrate of Chengdu and compiler of the 50-volume *Literary Works in Chengdu*, to be a trusted confidant and close friend.

Aesthetic appreciation during that time is another factor contributing to the formation of the Chengzhai Poetic Style. The beginning of Song poetry can be traced back to the poems by “nine monks,” a group of renowned poets who lived in the Shu area during the late Tang Dynasty. Fang Hui, a scholar in the Yuan Dynasty, stated in his *Preface to Luo Shouke’s Poems*, “Poetry can be divided into different styles, represented by Bai Juyi’s Style, Xikun Style, and Late Tang Style. Among poems of the Late Tang Style, those composed by the ‘nine monks’ are the most genuine and intriguing.” Sima Guang interpreted in his *Continued Discourse on Poetry*, “The so-called nine monks are Xi Zhou from Jiannan, Bao Xian from Jinhua, Wen Zhao from Nanyue, Xing Zhao from Tiantai, Jian Chang from Wozhou, Wei Feng from Qingcheng, Hui Chong from Huainan, Yu Zhao from Jiangnan, and Huai Gu from Emei,” and “In the autumn of the first year of Yuanfeng period during Emperor Shenzong of Song’s reign, I visited Yuquan Temple on Wan’an Mountain and got the *Poems of the Nine Monks* from Jinshi Scholar Min Jiaorus’ residence...This collection was compiled and annotated by Chen Chong, a compiler of Zhizhao Imperial Library.” The

locations where the nine monks lived remain uncertain. Except for three monks from the Shu area, namely, Xi Zhou, Wei Feng, and Huai Gu, the other six monks are from other places. So, it is interesting that there are narrations about the Shu area in both Bao Xian and Wen Zhao's poems, such as *Autumn of Bajiang River (Jialing River)* and *On Hearing the Cry of Apes in Baxia Gorge*. Ouyang Xiu also praised the poems of the nine monks stating, "The poems composed by these nine monks are not only fantastic but also exquisite in their own right. However, only a few have been passed down to us today. Renowned verses such as, 'The horse descends from heaven and lands on earth; Patterns carved on dishes are like clouds after the battle,' and 'Beyond Guilin Mountain, the beauty of spring shines. Meanwhile, you are afar on South China Sea coastlines that are so magnificent that they remain unparalleled in our era.'" Monk Guanxiu's poems about the Shu area and Tang Qiu's poems were also the highlights of late Tang poetry. Yang Wanli frequently discussed the aesthetic choices embodied in late Tang poems in his *Chengzhai's Discourse on Poetry* and other works, such as *Reflections on Reading Lu Guimeng's Poetic Works Written in Lize*. In this piece, he wrote, "Guimeng's poetry is renowned throughout the ages; whenever I read it, I am deeply moved. With whom can I discuss the beauty of Late Tang poems, given that they have been overlooked in our time?"

Ba-Shu Elements Embodied in Chengzhai Poetic Style

The available historical records do not offer conclusive evidence regarding whether Yang Wanli resided in or journeyed to the Shu area. Despite a thorough examination of various chronicles, such as the *Chronicle of Yang Wanli* by Xiao Donghai (Xiao, 2007), no corresponding records have been found. However, based on Yang's works about the Bashu area, there appears to be some indication of his potential journey to the Shu area. This is evidenced by his poem *Records of Departure from Chikou by Ship to Jiankang via Shilitou and Panjiawan Wharves*, which reads, "The front wave moves swiftly, two thousand miles a day. Crossing Yanyu Rapids, near Emei Mountain's way. If the wind had persisted for another two days without a source of water, the river would have run dry. However, the seawater from the west replenished the river nearby. Had I known the winds were so strong, I would have traveled by land. Misjudged the river's speed, and now I can't make a stand. To rush ahead or not, I'm left with a difficult choice, To compete with the river god, what tactic can I deploy? Water blocks at Emei Mountain, and the path is now unclear. No water to follow back, and the journey leads me nowhere."^① From the lines, "Frequently, I dreamt of washing hands at the bank of Jin River. Peach blossoms floated on the water surface as if they were bidding my boat a goodbye ride," in his poem *Seeing off Supervisor Wang*

① Chikou refers to the present-day Chikou Town, located in Guichi County, Anhui province by the Yangtze River.

Gongfu to Take Office in Tongchuan, it appeared that Yang often dreamed of his life in the Shu area. The poem also embodies clues regarding Li Bai's farewell to his good friend Wang Lun. In the poem *Ode to the Pomegranate*, when Yang saw the pomegranate before his eyes, he recounted how Mr. Liu went to great lengths to retrieve a pomegranate in order to treat Sima Xiangru's polydipsia by saying, "If it were not for the treatment of Sima Xiangru's polydipsia, why would Mr. Liu go to such lengths to retrieve the pomegranate?" In his *Two Poems about Song of White Hair*, Yang narrated the tale of Sima Xiangru and Zhuo Wenjun by stating, "Wenjun alone composed the Song of White Hair. Her remorse surging like waves in the sea. She bitterly laments Sima Xiangru's change of heart, regretting only having fallen for him due to the melody of his strings." He also wrote in his *Inscription to Magistrate Wang Bingde's New Residence in Chengdu* that, "In the manor north of the Baihua Pond, Zi Mei's abode. You now claim it, crafting verses as a heartfelt ode. Mountains split as sharp as Jianmen Pass, topped with slender clouds, while the river carries the fragrance of the snow, so loud. Waters brush against the stones, creating red silk waves, over this liquid expanse white gulls have their own brave parades. Who might be in the night, reciting Sima Xiangru's verse? Besides the high walls orchids bloom, a picturesque universe." These verses demonstrate Yang Wanli's comprehensive knowledge of the celebrities in the Bashu area and their works.

The essence of Yang Wanli's poetic expression lies in delving into the spiritual and sensual aspects of nature, which reflects a deep-seated aesthetic inclination towards self-discovery. He created a poetic natural landscape brimming with vitality and evocative emotions. When Zhou Ruchang edited the *Introduction to Selected Works of Yang Wanli* (1962), he emphasized that, "...in addition to novelty, peculiarity, briskness, amusement and humor, Chengzhai's 'liveliness' in poetry creation also embodies hierarchical zigzags and diverse changes." The recommendation and promotion by Zhang Jun and Yu Yunwen, renowned chancellors hailing from the Shu area, also exerted a significant impact on Yang Wanli's life. Yang Wanli mentioned it in his poem *Reply to Letters of Yu Zuyu*, in which he wrote, "Both lords Zhang Jun and Yu Yunwen have recommended me. Zhang helped me improve my salary, while Yu recommended I serve in a higher position in the court. They were both from the Shu area, but they did not have any previous personal connections." Yang also composed a poem to express his gratitude towards Zhang Jun, titled "Eulogy to My Deceased Mentor Zhang Jun." The poem reads, "Despite your departure, the people of Zhou (present-day Zibo city in Shandong province) still hold out hope for your return while enemy troops remain wary of your retreat. Although you made good use of the opportunities, the outcome was not entirely within your control. Since we parted, what fate have you found? Whose words made my heart sink down to the ground? I will cherish the memory of you for a lifetime, but I may never find a place to satisfy my longing for you." "At the side of the study where you research Yi-ology, I once heard the sound of your steps

inside. Your understanding of Yi-ology surpasses that conveyed by the Eight Diagrams, and your actions are all influenced by this knowledge. You have been concerned about the fate of the country, yet how can it be that you are destined to live such a short life? The mere thought of having lost you fills me with profound sorrow. Tonight, there is no moon visible in Yongzhou. Instead, the drizzling rain accompanies me as I lean beside the window until dawn breaks.” Yang Wanli also composed a poem titled *Upon Reading the Reflection Edict of the Emperor*, in which he wrote, “I advise you not to the *Luntai Imperial Edict*, lest you be compelled to sweep. How can these invaders be tolerated? The emperor desires not mere bravery, but true warriors of valor. What crime have virtuous families’ sons committed? Who knows who will be elected a general? May those with hidden agendas be severely punished, should there be a desire to avoid grief in Yanmen.” At the same time, Yang Wanli also wrote poems to eulogize Yu Yunwen. For example, in his *Ode to the Sea*, Yang Wanli extolled Yu’s remarkable achievements during the Caishiji Battle, while in his *Eulogy to Chancellor Yu Yunwen*, he remarked that “the burdens you bear are by no means light and your knowledge is far from meager. Snowy mountains are a truly majestic sight, and the Battle of Chibi once again serves as a pivotal moment in history. Upon a person’s passing, only a solitary lunar trail remains as their companion. Zhongda is no longer available, and true talent requires no validation of sound.”

Among the literary works of Yang Wanli, a significant portion pertains to Shu-related themes, including bidding farewell and greeting officials entering the Shu area, seeing off Shu natives returning to their hometowns, paying tribute to predecessors in the Bashu area, documenting friendships with the people of Shu, and inscribing books and pictures related to the Shu area. Lines that pay tribute to predecessors in the Bashu area include, “In the place where Zhexian left his poems, the spring breeze takes charge of sweeping away spider webs and dust with its gentle breath” (*Records of Climbing the Fenghuang Mountain*), “Zhexian revels in the world with a courtesan whose countenance is as precious as jade, envied by myriad blossoms. The luminous moon glides into the undulating waves, evading capture. The celestial North Star and lunar orb are steadfast companions, voyaging in unison” (*Records of Climbing Emei Pavillion in Niuzhu*), “The calycanthus praecox of the back mountain, unbeknownst to the mountain itself, was coaxed into poetic expression by Su Shi’s artful hand. Amidst the resplendent golden blossoms, two acquaintances indulge in libations from cups resembling the exquisite lotus leaves, conversing about their mutual solitude,” and “In the moon’s radiance, the silhouettes of blossoms and figures are tripartite, yet I yearn for a companion to recite verse with” (*Reply to Su Dongpo’s Poem about Admiration of the Calycanthus Praecox*). In his *Records of Visiting the Siwuxie Study in the North of Su Dongpo’s Former Residence in Baihefeng Mountain on the Twelfth Day of the First Lunar Month and Discovering His Authentic Works*, he employed a rare long-song style to lament the vicissitudes of life experienced by poets in the Shu area by saying, “Throughout

history, poets have often faced exile. Su Shi was once exiled to Huizhou, while Li Bai was sent away to Yelang. The Creator is believed to deride us; thus, each of us is relegated to our own confinement.” Yang’s lines that describe the landscape of the Shu area include “Myriad mountains were interlaced with a thousand streams, as two travelers meandered towards Pitong” (*Records of Climbing a Mountain with My Elder Son after My Recovery from the Illness as the Rain Stops and Orioles Sing on June 24*), “The succulent red lychee fruit along the Jinjiang River suddenly came to mind,” “The moon of Mount Emei is in my grasp, reflecting into the courtyard below as I hold a glass of wine” (*Seeing off Mr. Li to Take Office in Meizhou*), and “The principles of benevolence and justice are like the half-moon hanging over Mount Ba, always shining bright” (*Inscription to Li Zhizheng’s Yigai Hall*). Yang Wanli also composed poems to record his friendships with the Shu people, for example, “Flowers brim with sorrow, whilst the moon harbors resentment, forever weeping in lament. As time elapses, the surroundings undergo constant transformation. I departed from the bank of the Jinjiang River and have yet to return; however, I still advise others to navigate their way home” (*Two Poems Composed When I Heard the Song of Cuckoo at a Stone Bridge in the West of Yongfeng County*), “Although I had never met the scholars of the Minjiang River, their reputation preceded them. By chance did I come upon the mansion and fortuitously encountered the poet. If you don’t have a special idea in mind, how could you possibly pen such an exquisite poem? Talking about the present, yet I still yearn for the past; With a happy ending, I am reluctant to let it go” (*Reply to Shu scholar Gan Yanhe’s Two Poems Composed in the Rhyme of My Poem to Zhang Shi during His Temporary Stay at Zhang Jun’s Residence*), and “The mandarin ducks hold the cassia from the Moon Palace in their beaks, while the orphaned chick yearns for the paulownia tree in the Shu area alone” (*Bidding Farewell to Li Jiyun upon His Return to Shu Following His Pass of the Imperial Examination*). Poems regarding seeing off Shu natives returning to their hometowns or bidding farewell and greeting officials entering the Shu area include, “Meeting for a few days and then parting once again, the words ‘take care’ are too difficult to utter” (*Seeing off Liu Juezhi to Return to Shu*), “Your talent shines as brightly as Zhuge Liang in Longzhong, while your demeanor is as noble as the Dukes of Jin in Jiangzuo. Your status in Sichuan is akin to a flag standing tall at the southernmost point of the country, and you fan your feathered fan on the banks of the Yangtze River with elegance and humility” (*Seeing off Qiu Chong to Take Office in the Shu Area*), “The Minshan Mountain gleams like polished jade, while the Minjiang River flows crystal clear as a pair of eyes. In such a natural environment, the talent for romance and color was cultivated. I consider myself fortunate to have encountered two gifted offspring from the esteemed Zhang family” (*Seeing off Zhang Wei and Zhang Tao, Two Sons of Shu Scholar Zhang Zhiyuan to Return Home After Their Pass of the Imperial Examination for Children*), “In the Jiashu year, we gathered together to discuss literature and art when we were young and full of ambition. Today, seeing each other

again, we find that our hair has turned gray. We bid farewell by the Qujiang River in the third month of spring and now reconvene at Beique Gate. You resigned from your official position that offers a considerable salary, like the famous literature master Bing Yuan, who was not troubled by material things. While I remain a modest scholar as time passes by. In this letter, I send a message to Officer Yang, please do not say that where I live is cold and desolate, even the medicinal herb *Poria cocos* is rarely seen” (*Seeing off Zhu Shigu for TongChuan*). In addition, poems such as *Seeing off Shu Scholar Fan Sizhai for Quanzhou to Visit Master Wan Xianzhi*, *A Poem of Watching Tea Acrobatics by an Old Monk on a Matting with Dan’an*, *Gratitude for Zhao Maofu’s Gifts of Caozhong Writing Brush and Shuyue Paper*, *Two Poems on the Occasion of Bidding Farewell to Huang Zhongbing as He Assumes the Position of Magistrate in Luzhou*, *Postscript to Meishan Native Cheng Ren’s Ten Thousand-Character Grass Script*, and *Postscript to Shu Native Wei Zhiyao’s Ten Thousand-Character Grass Script*, also embody the same theme.

He expressed his admiration for Ren Jinyan, a native of Meishan, in an essay entitled “Preface to Master Ren’s *Xiaochou Collection*,” wherein he lauded the unique style of Master Ren’s poetry characterized by original and prominent writing, vigorous yet sturdy momentum, and unwavering loyalty and perseverance in spirit... His works were unconventional and did not blindly follow current trends, “Master Ren’s path to promotion is hindered by three attributes: an excessively straightforward temperament, excessive candor when dealing with court officials, and an overly idiosyncratic writing style. It is worth noting that for certain individuals, possessing even one of these attributes could propel them to become a celebrated figure in their era and be remembered by future generations. Therefore, it is truly remarkable that Master Ren was faced with all three simultaneously. Master Ren’s talent remained unrecognized because he possessed all three attributes, which is the fundamental reason.” In Volume 6 of *Helin Yulu*, Luo Dajing documented his endorsement of Wei Liaoweng’s theory of creation, “Yang Chengzhai stated that the current *Concise Rhymes from the Ministry of Rites (Libu Yunlüe)* limits scholars in their writing and does not allow them to improvise, making it difficult to appreciate their talents. When it comes to expressing emotions through poetry, we should follow the examples set by *The Book of Songs* and *Li Sao (Encountering Sorrow)*. Why should we be constrained by rhymes stipulated by the Ministry of Rites?” Wei Heshan also said, “In addition to the imperial examinations, poems composed on everyday occasions are not necessarily required to strictly adhere to specific rhyme schemes. Furthermore, contemporary conformity standards are primarily based on *Libu Yunlüe*.” In his later years, Yang Wanli wrote in *Chengzhai’s Discourse on Poetry* that “the recent Shu scholars are mostly skilled in composing parallel prosed characterized by four or six characters, such as those written by Cheng Dunhou (style name Zishan), Zhao Kui (style name Zhuangshu), Liu Yifeng (style name Shaomei) and Huang Jun (style name Zhongbing),” “by studying the works of renowned poets such

as Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian and thoroughly analyzing their techniques in creating poetry while comprehending the true meaning conveyed in their poems, one can effortlessly produce exceptional pieces” (Liu, 2016, p. 40). As stated in Dongpo’s poem *Making Tea with River Waters*, “To prepare a cup of tea, it is preferable to draw water from the flowing river and heat it over a crackling blaze. Furthermore, it is imperative to procure the purest and freshest liquid from the depths of the river beneath a fishing stone.” The seven-character second line conveys five meanings: first, the water is clear and fresh; second, the water must be collected from the depths of the river; third, the water must flow beneath a stone without soil; fourth, the stone is not a common one but specifically for fishing; fifth, Dongpo personally collected the water instead of delegating this task to a servant. “The luminous moon casts its reflection upon the rippling river. Scooping water with a ladle is akin to capturing the moon and pouring it into a capacious cask. Then, use a small spoon to transfer some into a vial.” These two lines illustrate the pristine clarity of the collected water. In particular, the process of transferring water from a cask to a vial highlights the intricacies involved in the art of tea-making. “When boiled, the tea foam rises and twirls like snow-white milk flowers. When poured out, it rumbles and shakes with the force of a fierce wind blowing through a pine forest.” These two lines are written in a typical inverted sentence style, which is a prominent skill of a poet,” “Dongpo also wrote, ‘As night descends, the clouds disperse and the luminous moonlight illuminates both sky and earth. The Milky Way, adorned with innumerable stars, silently orbits around the crystalline moon. During my lifetime, such moonlight is not frequently seen during the Mid-Autumn Festival night, so it is a rare occurrence to witness such a breathtaking scene as tonight’s.’ These four lines are truly remarkable (as they effectively convey the poet’s deep appreciation for this delightful evening).”

Conclusion

The literary achievements of Yang Wanli embody the essence of the Bashu literature throughout the ages. Renowned Shu celebrities, such as Sima Xiangru, Yang Xiong, and Wang Bao of the Han Dynasty, Li Bai and Du Fu of the Tang Dynasty, as well as Su Xun, Su Shi, and Su Zhe of the Song Dynasty all exerted an influence on him. Yang was additionally inspired by the literary creations of his companions from the Bashu area, like Huang Tingjian, Fan Chengda, Jing Tang, Wang Shipeng, and Lu You, who traveled around there. Their compositions significantly affected Yang’s poetic style while infusing Chinese literary history with the unmistakable taste of Bashu. Through diverse facets of this regional culture, he augmented both its cultural heritage and literature through his unique poetry style along with numerous written works.



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