

# ***On the Aesthetic Implication of Tang Legend's Poetic Realization***

***– By Taking "Song of Everlasting Sorrow" and "Legend of Everlasting Sorrow" as Examples***

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**Abstract:** The novel has always been in a lower position in the history of ancient Chinese literature precisely because it does not belong to orthodox literature and can develop freely without restraint. As a representative, the Tang Legend as "Synthesis of Various Styles" in the Tang Legend's art system is an inevitable trend in developing ancient novels. Accordingly, it has inclusive and expansive internal tension that can absorb the advantages of various literary genres and forms. By analysing the politicisation of the Tang legend, this essay will take the famous Tang legend pieces *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* and the narrative poem of this story, *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, as examples and discuss them around the three parts, Shicai, Shibi and Discussions, thus showing the characteristics of the poeticisation of Tang legend. Through analysis of Shicai, the Tang legend are a body of lyrical works that, although partially drawn on historical records' veracity, also introduce unexpected turns to keep and attract readers' attention. By referring to the Tang Dynasty's talent selection method, these two works show the talent of fiction, imagination, and exaggeration through the use of the Shibi. The Discussion could even relate to abstract truths and accomplish the goal and needs of social propaganda. Combining these three factors ensures that the Tang legend represented by these masterpieces, *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* and *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, remains a source of inspiration and a significant reference for literary and artistic works.

**Keywords:** literature preparation, Shicai, poetic style, discussion

## **1. Introduction**

Juzi in the Tang Dynasty means intellectuals. They had to pass a state examination to become government officials. Also, Juren (another name for these candidates) in the Tang Dynasty used to be famous people at that time to let their names be heard and then deliver prepared works that could fully demonstrate their talents to examiners who advocated the imperial examination. After the first delivery, they delivered their work to them again, like the legends. These are all well-prepared pieces and can reflect the Shicai (史才, historical talents), Shibi (诗笔, poetic writing skills), and Discussions (议论, Yilun in Pinyin) in them [1].

Zhao Yanwei, a man of the Song Dynasty, had a famous exposition called the Tang legend, the "Synthesis of Various Styles", that is, the combination of Shicai, Shibi, and Discussion, is a legendary and unique art system [1]. "Synthesis of Various Styles" refers to the collection of various literary genres in the legend of the Tang Dynasty in one piece to achieve the fusion of multiple styles. Obviously, "Synthesis of Various Styles" is not simply a patchwork of various styles mixed but should be organised in an orderly manner, carefully arranged, and presented in a flexible and diverse text form. It can be said that "the literature is prepared for all styles" constitutes the fundamental condition for the independence and maturity of ancient novels, which can be said that the emergence of Tang legend marks the maturity of Chinese classical novels [2]. Indeed, some scholars have put forward different views. It is believed that the coexistence of "Shicai", "Shibi", and "Discussion" in Tang legend shows the characteristics of the immature narrative period of Chinese novels. Their existence shows that the novel style tries to change from narrative features independent of attachment to other genres [3]. Zhao Zhixin of the Qing Dynasty highly evaluated the Tang works, *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* and *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow*. One of his poems said: "When the country is overthrowing to praise Tianbao, talented people explain lovesickness with examples. Sansheng influenced Chen Hongchuan, and Bai juyi established a poetry style [4]." This comment is enough to show the importance of these two texts in the history of literature. The famous researcher Tschen Yinkoh believes that the so-called "historical talent" can be seen, and the part of the discussion, the biography of the Chen family, should be [5]. Therefore, this study has chosen these two typical texts as examples to explore precisely the characteristics of the poeticisation of the Tang legend.

## 2. Shicai

As mentioned above, Shicai can be understood as historical talent. Generally speaking, those named "Ji" (记, A style of writing), including "Zhi" (志, A style of writing) and "Record" (录, A style of writing), focus on the fantasy and grotesque of the storyline. The novel named "Biography" (传, Zhuan in Pinyin, A style of writing) focuses on the portrayal of the characters, and the narration of the characters is relatively complete, which is quite similar to the official historical biographies such as *Records of the Grand Historian*. Although the biographical style belongs to history writing, *Records of the Grand Historian's* author Sima Qian did not stop at recording the historical facts but paid great attention to the storytelling, centring on the development of the fate of the protagonist and narrating it in chronological order with clear storylines and layers, and a strong sense of humour and integrity. All these historical writings accumulated a wealth of experience, formed various techniques and were absorbed by legendary writers, becoming an expectation and even a standard for the legends, which is Shicai.

### 2.1. The Authenticity of "Shicai"

The formation of "Shicai" in Tang legend is closely related to historical biography literature. In *National History Supplement*, Volume 2, Li Zhao highly evaluated *The World Inside a Pillow* and *Mao Ying's Biography*, which is not a historical style. He said these works are especially high-level, not inferior to Sima Qian, and the two articles are excellent historical materials. The meanings of good historical materials in the mind of Li Zhao are narrative artistry and perspective and telling the truth to everyone who lives in the world. The most important meaning is based on history as the standard.

The legend draws lessons from the writing techniques of historical biography literature, which revolves around the development process of the protagonist's fate, narrates in chronological order, and shapes the character's personality. For example, *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* is narrated in chronological order. Before each event occurs, specify when the event occurred, the time should be

clarified. At the same time, the author truthfully writes the actions of historical figures according to the facts in history. Through the actions and behaviours of the characters, the personality of the characters is shaped, and the output of subjective ideas is avoided as much as possible. The article describes Emperor Xuanzong of Tang's shameful behaviour of occupying his daughter-in-law. Emperor Ming of Tang (another name for Emperor Xuanzong of Tang) ordered Gao Li to investigate secretly outside the palace and found the daughter of Hongnong (region's name in ancient China) Yang Xuanyan, in the Shouwang residence, already fifteen years old. This part shows Emperor Xuanzong of Tang's greed for beauty and the disregard for ethics by high-ranking people. The author also faithfully wrote the historical events. According to *Yang Guozhong Biography* in the *New Book of Tang*, it wrote that "at this time, Lu Shan had taken control of the northern part of the river and gathered the elite cavalry of You and Bing to plot a rebellion, but he had no excuse to act yet, waiting for an opportunity to wait for the emperor's thousandth anniversary before plotting a rebellion." In *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow*, it wrote that "At the end of the Tianbao period, Yang Guozhong, Yang Guifei's brother, unreasonably acquired the official position of prime minister and recklessly handled state affairs. When An Lushan led an attack on the Capitol, he used the crusade against the Yang family as an excuse to rise." Yang Guifei, also called Concubine Yang, the daughter of Yang Xuanyan, is also affected by this incident, setting the stage for the following tragedy. All these works, the official history records and the legend, depict the same battle called An-Shi Rebellion in the Tang dynasty.

## 2.2. The Interestingness Revealed by "Shicai"

The author's inclinations are expressed euphemistically, not directly, but in a convoluted and roundabout way to make them known. It treats everyone equally and does not hide from the venerable, which gives the legend during the Tang Dynasty a certain historical value. From the point of view of historical narration, the concept of Shicai gives affirmative praise to Tang legend, mainly because it is different from the previous narrative fiction form of "unofficial history, remnant gossip, and hearsay", which makes it has the value and significance of "official history"[3]. However, the second half of *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* mostly comes from folklore. It depicts the real performance of a normal man after losing his love, and it also truly shows a woman's longing after being separated from the man she loved. Therefore, people's emotional desires in real life and social group psychology can be the core content of the concept of "Shicai".

The authors of the Tang legend intended to tell a story, so they pursued the effect of storytelling to a certain extent. In order to tell the story well and attractively, some plots must be added in the process of telling the story to enhance the interest in the story. For example, the plot of that lets a man of magic seek out immortals and medicinal herbs and ask for life advice.

Comparing the performance improvement of Tang legend with the Zhiguai novel (the tales of mystery and the supernatural), the historical progress shown in Tang legend is mainly the transformation from the world of gods and monsters to the real world, which constitutes the prerequisite for legends to absorb and learn from historical literature. This not only refers to the change of subject matter but also includes the change of artistic style. The full text of *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* revolves around the love story between Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and Yang Guifei. It is based on real historical events and accompanied by a certain literary imagination, which makes the whole legend more interesting. After the Anshi Rebellion, Yang Guifei died at Mawei Slope, and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang became ill from missing her, so he ordered alchemists to search for her all over the world. Emperor Xuanzong of Tang was so pleased that the Taoist priest asked him to invoke the spirit of Yang Guifei. The alchemist tried his best to find it, but he could not find it. He can swim the spirit and control the energy, go out of heaven, there is no place to seek it, and he does not see it. He was able to make his spirit leave his body and fly on the clouds, going up

to the heavenly realm and down to the earthly realm, searching like this, but he could not find it either. He searched in the four directions of heaven and earth, crossing the heavenly sea to the east and crossing the immortal mountain of Pengfu. Despite their detachment from reality, these fanciful and even exaggerated writings appeal to the reader and reflect the author's talent.

Since Tang legend was produced based on Zhiguai novels, it inevitably inherited the artistic characteristics that Zhiguai had already formed and still retained the characteristics of weirdness. In fact, it is impossible to escape entirely from the influence of the Zhiguai. What distinguishes the Tang legend from the chi-monsters is its greater respect for historical facts, its limited captaincy and its fictionalisation. This balance between fiction and reality, as reflected in writing related to historical events, makes Shicai and shows in the Tang legends masterpieces like *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* and *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*.

### 3. Shibi

#### 3.1. The Meaning of "Shibi"

Many commentators use the method towards legendary works of Chen Shidao, who lived in the Song dynasty, to explain the word "Shibi", which is mostly about "use the antithesis (对话, duiyu in Pinyin) to depict the scene". The most apparent feature in the legend is the insertion of rhymes, such as poems (shi in Pinyin). Therefore, Shibi can be understood as using poetic techniques to write the works.

Tang legend paid attention to Chinese lyric poetry, described the scenery in parallel prose language, and mixed poetry into the text, forming the artistic characteristics of a "Shibi". The way of interspersing poems in the text is very common. A total of 31 pieces of Tang legend in Pei Cheng's *Legends* (a piece of Tang legend collection) were compiled, of which 12 pieces were a blend of poetry and prose, accounting for about 41% of the total. There are over 80 poems in the Tang novel *You Xianku*, 12 poems in *Nan Bu Yan Hua Lu*, *Song Yue Jia Nv*, 14 poems in *Dongyang Night Monster Record*, and 11 poems in *Bufeiyuan*; the number can be described as a lot [6].

Poetry can often be seen in Tang legend, but in fact, the most important thing is to express the emotions contained in it through this method. Cheng Guofu, in his article *On the Narrative Art of Novels in the Tang and Five Dynasties*, pointed out that the so-called "poetry" is mainly manifested in the use of literary means such as fiction, imagination, and exaggeration in the creation of novels in the Tang and Five Dynasties. It is manifested in the obvious enhancement of narrative art [7]. To sum up, the "Shibi" of Tang Dynasty novels should actually be a generalisation of the poetic and lyrical characteristics of Tang Dynasty novels [8].

#### 3.2. "Shibi" for the System of Selecting Scholars at That Time

From the beginning of the Sui Dynasty, most rulers loved poetry and advocated literature. Emperors like Emperor Xuanzong of Tang were not only rulers of feudal society but also poets. By the time of Tang Gaozong, the imperial examination system had also changed to selecting scholars based on poetry and prose. *Tang Yin Gui Qian* (唐音癸签) by Hu Zhenheng of the Ming Dynasty, recorded, "At the beginning of Tang Dynasty's imperial examination, the examiners emphasised policy, as well as classics, and later they emphasised poetry; at the middle of Tang period, the emperor will mark the examination papers, chanted some essay that the Juzi writes in the examination. Alternatively, the emperor will find and talk with them secretly. After that, the emperor will accept other documents and give ranks and reputation. Scholars compete for fame and work rhythm. So, people think the prosperity of poetry is especially key." The changes in the upper-level system have affected the lives of the lower-level people. Society, not just the intellectuals, is more inclined to delve into poetry to gain access. Many poems and essays in the Tang Dynasty participated in the creation of legends, and

many Tang legend writers were born as Jinshi (successful candidates). According to Feng Yuanjun's textual research, except for the 27 people whose lives are unknown, among the other 21 Tang legend writers, there are 15 Jinshi, one should be Jinshi but failed, and the other three may also be Jinshi [9]. Therefore, the writers of Tang legend often also have the identity of poets.

Then, when poetry was so popular in the Tang Dynasty, why did the students submit "legends" to let the examiners "warm rolling" (温卷, wenjuan in Pinyin, know the Juzi's name and read his articles before the exam)? The author believes that, firstly, the single genre of poetry is not enough to show his rich knowledge to the examiners; secondly, the genre of poetry belongs to orthodox literature, which is relatively serious. It is fascinating and attracts the examiner to read these articles like legends. Thirdly, the ancient Chinese behave implicitly so that the students prefer to submit "legends" on the surface, but in fact, they are "poems" mixed with "legends". Therefore, Juzi prefers to use legends other than poems to let the examiners warm rolling. Moreover, the poems in Tang legend often express the characters' thoughts and feelings, sublimating the story's core and showing the author's poetic influence. In the Ming dynasty, Yang Shen praised the poems in Tang legends and wrote that poetry flourished in Tang Dynasty, and its authors often entrusted legend with gods and ghosts to pass on to later generations, and their poems are wonderful. Thousands of years, one word is worth a thousand gold. The legendary writing format and method have been preserved ever since. Most subsequent authors will have "Shibi" mixed into the legend.

### 3.3. "Shibi" and Legend of Everlasting Sorrow

In the history of literature, there are different views on the relationship between *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* and *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow*. Tschen Yin Koh started with the writing style and then concluded that "*Song of Everlasting Sorrow* is the poetic part of Tang Dynasty novels with various genres. It is an inseparable and independent work from *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow*, so it must be read together [10]." However, Xia Chengtao put forward the opposite point of view and believed that the two works could be separated and independent [11]. Wu Gengshun wrote in the article that except for the mention of the *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* in the part of the narration of the creation process in *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* and the mention of *Song of Yingying*," in *The Story of Yingying*, There is not even this small external connection between them. That is to say, these independent and complete poems and legends, although the subject is the same, they are written by two different authors in different styles. The two works of this work cannot be counted as one work by slapping together" [12]. Thus, these two academic views exist on the relationship between *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* and *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow*.

If the *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* and *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* is as a whole, *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* contains *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, so it naturally has the nature of a "Shibi". If the two are separated, the parallel style language in *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* can also show the nature of the Shibi. "Her hair is silky and smooth, her physique is fat and lean, and her manners are leisurely and graceful, like the Lady Li of Emperor Han Wu." Through phonology and rhyme, Yang Guifei's whole posture and beauty are expressed. At the same time, *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* also contains the aesthetic quality of poetry. "A deep cloud filled the house then, and the morning sun shone into the deep abode, and the fine portals were closed one by one, and there was no sound around." The author conceived a fairyland of Penglai, which is ethereal and illusory. Then the author describes in detail the plot of the alchemist looking for Yang Guifei, and the language is full of meaning and literary talent. These all show the poetry talent through Shibi.



#### 4. Discussion

The narrative art of pre-Qin narrative prose played an essential role in developing ancient Chinese novels and forming their unique artistic personality. Comments on events such as "Junzi Saying" (Junzi means ethical or educated people) in *Zuo Zhuan* and *Guo Yu* are also used in classical Chinese novels like Tang and Song legends. Such arguments are usually placed at the end of each article, and some are placed at the beginning or scattered throughout the article and are even spoken through the mouths of characters. These comments or arguments are Discussions mentioned here. Meng Zhaolian pointed out that the function of Discussion is to comment on the narrated story, degrade the characters, and try to abstract philosophy from the specific description [13].

It takes traditional morality as the standard. Novelists consciously follow historians and strive to express common ideas in different forms. Sima Qian wrote *Records of the Grand Historian* not only to record the historical facts that happened in history but also to express his own views on this historical event, which was in line with the social background and social atmosphere at that time. Legend novelists also use this method. There are roughly three understandings of *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*: allegorical poems, love poems, and allegories-love poems. According to Bai Juyi's literary theory, "emotion is the root, the text is the seedling, the sound is the flower, and righteousness is the truth". Bai Juyi and Chen Hong started from the "truth" - "The intention of Bai Juyi was not only to express his own sentiments but also to show future generations what can happen to women who are too beautiful and that the ruler can thus stop the beginnings of trouble." Therefore, this article has certain political considerations to criticise the noble concubine for misusing the country. However, he unconsciously revealed his enthusiasm for the prosperity of the Kaiyuan period and his regret and regret for the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty. Moreover, the "Sorrow" in *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* is reflected here.

#### 5. Conclusion

All in all, by comparing *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* and *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow*, there is a concrete and powerful insight into the poetic representation of the Tang legend in three ways. The Tang legend is a collection of poetic texts that draw on the authenticity of historical records to a certain extent but add twists and turns to enhance the reader's interest through Shicai, in which Shibi refers to the use of literary devices such as fiction, imagination and exaggeration, catering to the talent selection system of the Tang Dynasty, a product of the imperial examination system. Also, they all adopt the Discussion to refer to abstract truths, meeting the needs of social propaganda. Through the analysis, there can be seen the special status of the Tang legend in the history of Chinese literature, which continues to be an essential source of inspiration and even a module for following literary works. However, this article only refers to *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* and *Legend of Everlasting Sorrow* for presenting a better perspective, lacking the in-depth scrutiny of all other works.

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