Vol.1 No.12 2020
https://doi.org/10.37420/j.cer.2020.121

An Analysis of the Leisure Connotation of the Boat Imagery in Song Ci

Cuiai Zhang*
Faculty of Humanities, Yancheng Institute of Technology, Yancheng, China
*Corresponding author, e-mail: zca501@163.com

Abstract: *Whole Poetry of Song Dynasty contains rich imagery of boat. Ci writers remember loved ones, sensationalize feelings of separation, express their minds directly and the like by means of boat imagery. It expresses a wealth of emotion such as turbulence, unworldly sentiment and having nothing to rely on. This paper mainly discusses the boat imagery in Poetry of the Song Dynast which embodies the leisure interest of the poets' pursuit of spiritual freedom. Going boating on an impulse in the nature reflects the poets' pursuit of leisure interest. The spiritualized boat of "wandering in the heart" embodies the life realm of Ci writers' pursuit of forgetting everything. The poets abandon themselves to boats to blend into the natural landscape, forgetting worry and concern, indifferent to honor and disgrace and enjoying pleasure and joyfulness. It reflects the poets' free spirit realm of standing aloof from worldly affairs and carrying nothing.*

Keywords: *Song Dynasty; The boat; Leisure connotation; Artistic features*

Introduction

China has a long history of making boats. There is a legend going that, boats have been invented in Yellow Emperor. In ancient times, people mostly lived in areas with abundant water resources and those densely covered with rivers and lakes. At the beginning, boats and ships existed as an important means of transportation closely related to people's life. With the development of economy and culture, people endow the boat with spirituality, making it emit the brilliance of human beauty. In the earliest extant poetry collection Book of Songs, there existed some chapters taking ships and boats as the theme, such as Cypress Boat, Two Children in a Boat and so on. A lot of rich boat imagery in *Whole Poetry of Song Dynasty* keeps on coming. Poets remember loved ones, sensationalize feelings of separation, and express their minds directly and the like by means of boat imagery. It expresses a wealth of emotion such as turbulence, unworldly sentiment and having nothing to rely on. This paper mainly discusses the boat imagery in Poetry of the Song Dynast which embodies the leisure interest of the poets' pursuit of spiritual freedom.

Going Boating on an Impulse in the Nature Reflects the Poets' Pursuit of Leisure Interest

Boat appeared in the leisure Ci is also regarded as a tool for touring on an impulse. For example, Su Shi's Ci poetry *Good Things Come Near: on the Lake*:

Vol.1 No.12 2020
https://doi.org/10.37420/j.cer.2020.121

The lake ripples after the rain against clear autumn sky and crisp air. It is the most suitable to spend leisure time boating on the lake. The pole of the punting boat is only half overtopped by the lake. The lake reflects my decrepit appearance from the boat' red railing. I am totally drunk and the white yarns on my head are blown into the lake by a gust of autumn wind from mountain streams. While the lake ripples and the moonlight waves freely, I row away alone on the smoky and unsteadily swaying lake.

Yu Biyun commented on this poem in his *Selected Commentaries on Ci Poems of the Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties and Song Dynasties*: "The poet returns from the West Lake on a quiet night which is worthy of elegant Ci. The last four sentences show a sense of freedom and detachment. Two words "piao wu" in the complimentary closure especially demonstrate the charm of the canoe." Su Shi goes boating on West Lake during one day off every ten days or after finishing business. He doesn't come back home until moonlit night when he enjoys himself to the full. Su Shi not only goes boating on the beautiful West Lake, but also in Mizhou. He once wrote in *Man Jiang Hong: Party in Liubei Pavilion of East Wu*: "Recently the official business has piled up. After the storms there are few more sunny spring days. Today we make an appointment to have a banquet by the water. The whole city flocks together. Have you ever heard of the story called Lan Ting Xiu Xi during the Eastern Jin Dynasty? At that day a crowd of talented and noble literati would gather at the water's edge. But now only bamboos left have grown all over the hills. The past is gone, and there is no way to find it." The poet lets himself to finish the official affairs as quickly as possible so that he could go boating blithely with the common people. People all over town help the old and guide the young, scrambling to the rivers. Su Shi who knows how to relax sees the joy of people's livelihood as his official purpose. At the same time, he makes himself comfortable and relaxed. When in Huangzhou, he wrote in his poem *Water Dragon Chant*, "I dreamed of crossing the Yangtze River in a little boat and appreciating the Qixia Tower on the Red Cliff. My Friends were holding a spectacular feast. Girls who sang and danced in the banquet became hazily drunk, with laughter resounding in the air." Boating in the natural landscape frees people from troubles, thus bringing them physical and mental joviality.

Yang Wanli's Ci poetry *Lady Zhaojun's Lament: Yong Lotus in the Rain*:

I sleep at noon in the summer and dream of boating on the lotus-covered West Lake where is full of smoke water and dense fragrance. A sudden shower like sifting beans hits the awning of the boat, making "pu-pu" sounds that wake me up from the dream of lotus appreciation. I thought I was admiring the lotus on the West Lake, but it turns out to be a lunch break at home. I am waked by the sound that rapid rain is beating the lotus in the pond. The crystal raindrops jump up and down on the lotus leaf, which gather and scatter suddenly as well as disperse like a bolt of pearls. Raindrops falling in every direction look dazzling and finally gather in the heart of leaf, like a nest of shiny mercury.

Xie Yi's Ci poetry *Fishermen's Pride*:

Autumn river levels as a mirror and that is clear down to see the bottom. No ripples can be visible on the river. A west wind suddenly blows on a small island full of polygonum flowers which are swaying in the wind and look like waves at first sight. A thin mist hangs over the river, and a little boat flickers in view through it. The little boat finally reaches the shore hanging a wicker. There are two golden carp stringing the wicker which carries little drops of rain. Faced with the less satisfactory results, the

fisherman in the boat sighs that the use of straight hook fishing is no longer possible. He plays the flute which is melodious and resounds through the empty mountains, with its voice repressing the clouds. After blowing the flute, the fisherman picks up a sharp knife and cuts the carp into strips of red meat. The taste of the newly brewed rice wine is mellow, and the fisherman eats the fish and drinks heartily until he is completely drunk. And then the fisherman sleeps soundly wearing coir raincoat.

Xin Qiji's Ci poetry *Partridges in the Sky: Poetize Snow with Zhao Wending*:

Don't take the boat to the Shanxi River. Drinking leisurely and singing softly are just right for a match. I return from some place, but to find dogs barking and thousands of families awake. It is as legendary as the plum blossom in winter, whose fragrance strikes all of a sudden. The wine warms me u, so I take my waking slow to find that painted eaves come off and jade chopsticks are on the floor. My friend, Zhao Wending, uses poems to arouse the feeling of enjoying plum blossoms in the snow. He writes the poetry on color paper that is not enough.

There are also many other Ci writers who travel by boat in the nature, including the ten works *A Light Boat With Short* created by Ouyang Xiu mentioned above. For example, "The two paddles split ripples overgrown with water shield while the coir raincoat is drenched with dense rain in the pine forest. A mood of melancholy, like twilight, rises gradually and fills the sky. I call to the gull and wish to ally with it. It flutters like it's coming down, but then turns its back and skims the treetops. That time I take the boat back to Wu Xing overnight against swinging clouds and cold snow." (Jiang Kui's *Spring Celebrated in Palace*); "Beauties go on a tour on a bright and beautiful day in spring. The decorative flowers are crooked on their thick and beautiful hair. With the sun setting down, the richly decorated cruise ship carries the spring back. I feel not fully satisfied about this trip and transfer my interest to the lake and mist on the lake. Tomorrow I will look for lost flower-shaped piece of jewelry made from emerald jewels on the path to the lake with residual intoxication." (Yu Guobao's *Wind through Pines*); "The richly decorated cruise ship all swing into the Xiling Bridge, with half of the West Lake's spring scenery lying idle."(Mei Mi's *Meander Through Spring*). These poets achieve the freedom of the mind and the pleasure of leisure by boating in nature.

Human beings invented boat in the leisure of labor and used boats to enrich leisure time. Song Ci poetry sustains the poet's emotion and sentiment and embodies the poet's leisure interest in pursuing spiritual freedom. Hence, the boat has become a carrier of human emotions, and it has evolved from a worldly tool into an artistic sprite.

The Spiritualized Boat of "Wandering in the Heart" Embodies the Life Realm of Ci Writers' Pursuit of Forgetting Everything

Chuang Tzu: Lie Yukou said, "The industrious are exhausted due to labor; the wise are troubled with thinking; the incapable without pursuit get around when they are stuffed, leading a wandering life like no fixed boats. People who travel around feel illusory." (Wang & Ji, 2013). Chuang Tzu believed that the worldly people who were calculating and displayed wits were tired of fatigue while those without scheming and requests could roam after satiation. They lived a leisurely and free life like boats floating on the water with an open mind

Vol.1 No.12 2020
https://doi.org/10.37420/j.cer.2020.121

and no attachment. Chuang Tzu used the idea of a boat floating freely on the water to describe the state of leisure in which the sage had no attachment to things and no service for things. This kind of boat symbolizing spiritual freedom is widely existed in Song Ci, such as Su Shi's *The Immortal on the River*:

> *I drink again while sobering up at night in Dongpo. When I come back in the dead of night, the houseboys have already been fast asleep and snoring like thunder. I knock repeatedly and nobody inside answers. I have no choice but to rely on the Li Zhang alone, listening to the ripples of the river water and a faint sigh of slow flapping back the beach. Long hate my body in official career and I don't own it anymore. When can I forget to strive for fame and fortune! How I want to take a small boat to depart on the smooth river without wave while the night deepens and calm wind blows. How much I want to live the rest of my life messing around in rivers, lakes and seas.*

This poem is impromptu work to express emotion when the poet is drunk overnight while living in exile in Huangzhou. Su Shi is so broad-minded and free there that he sometimes wears cloth clothes and stamps on the straw shoes in and out of the field path. At times he goes boating with dedication to the landscape in the moonlight just to seek the enjoyment of beauty from nature and to appreciate the philosophy of life. Meanwhile Su Shi obtains the freedom and pleasure of body and mind. His other works about the boat imagery also embody the leisure realm of forgetting everything and transcending soul. For example, "I dream of taking a boat and wandering in clouds and water, with huge white waves swaying in the air."(Su Shi's *Joy of Returning to the Imperial Court*); "I am totally drunk and the white yarns on my head are blown into the lake by a gust of autumn wind from mountain streams. When the lake ripples and the moonlight waves freely, I row away alone on the smoky and unsteadily swaying lake." (*Good Things Come Near*); "At the evening banquet full of fragrance, there are stunning beauties for you to appreciate. Don't take the way to Suzhou city, just like Fan Li who once went to Taihu Lake with his beauty Xi Shi." (*Poems to the Tune of Pu Sa Man*); "The command of an emperor is too great to be disobeyed. I still retain my moral integrity and probably expect that the emperor will grant me a chance to be pardoned. However, my old ideas and habits are hard to change. Well, I will still float on the sea in a boat for the rest of my life." (*Thousands of Autumn Passing-By: Replying Rhyming Shaoyou*)

Another example is Tang Geng's work (1071-1121) *Tell It From The Heart: Melancholy On A Journey*:

> *I do not know how to frown or worry in my life, so I can be magnanimous in all things. But when coming across something worrying, I begin to be seriously worried. With the setting sun, the big river rolls to the east on majestically, with the perpetuating waves and constantly flowing water. Bleak wind of autumn blows orchid and pollia japonica thunb. A faint cloud and smoke cover the brimming autumn rivers. Alas, where will the boat drift?*

The poet doesn't have a frown on his face in life. Regardless of what has happened, just let things slide and he himself still strolls idly in a courtyard. It has never occurred to him that a journey could be so frustrating. The poem does not explain the cause of frustration, but he describes what he sees when he is frustrated. When the sun sets, the great river flows and eastward waves sweep away, never to return again. The orchid, pollia japonica thumb and vanilla all utter sad calls in the evening breeze while the water of the Cang Lang fades away in the evening mist. In classical Chinese literature, vanilla has always been the embodiment of

a man of noble character. The water of the Cang Lang is a place where they could live in solitude. Records from *History of Song Dynasty* show that: "Tang Geng was demoted and sent to Huizhou after prime minister of the day, Zhang Shangying, was deposed." (Tuo, 1977). Perhaps being banished to Huizhou will not worry the poet. What really worries him is that, his leisure mind and quiet place have been swallowed up by the secular society like a curtain of darkness. "Where will the boat drift?" The great river flows against the dim light of the vast night. Where is the boat that I can take? This poem expresses the spiritual realm of Ci writer's desire for freedom of mind and body and forgetting everything.

Other Ci writers also used the boat to express the free spiritual realm of forgetting everything. For example, "Against cold clouds and dim sky, I take a little boat, leaving the riverside with great interest." (Liu Yong's *Joy at Midnight*); "Is this the world of the jade or the wilderness of gem? On the vast mirror-like lake carries a small rowboat." (Zhang Xiao-xiang's *Nian Nujiao Cross Dongting Lake*); "From ancient times, intellectuals have affected themselves adversely and regretted why they hadn't taken a boat leaving the world earlier in those days. If they did, they could have been drunk to lie by the water with full of weed, appreciating the seagulls and herons strolling leisurely against the sun setting down." (Lu You's *Curtain Made of Pearls*); "How I want to paddle back when the spring water rises, just like Fan Li carrying Xi Shi on a boat on Taihu Lake."(Xin Qiji's *Poems to the Tune of Dong Xian Ge*); "The ownerless and unpiloted boats are bohemian and unconstrained, floating on rivers and seas for years."(Zhu Dunru's *Partridges in the Sky*); "In my life, I cannot do like Du Fu who showed his sense of responsibility on his country and people, so I learn from wild and free boats. I could tell what I want to express to the trees and bamboos in the garden that they could be made into paddles and boats when they are grown."(Li Yunzi's *Magnolia Slow*); "I take a boat to the place surrounded by mountains, beating the huge waves in the process. Maybe faery sympathizes with my exhausting and tiring journey for a long time let me find peace in the dream."(Du Yu's *Groping For Fish: On The Lake*) All above Ci poetries demonstrate that the poets abandon themselves to boats to blend into the natural landscape, forgetting worry and concern, indifferent to honor and disgrace and enjoying pleasure and joyfulness. These poems reflect the poets' free spirit realm of standing aloof from worldly affairs and carrying nothing.

The thoughts of both the government and the people of the Song Dynasty become open-minded for two reasons. One is the enjoyment advocated by the supreme ruler of the day and the other is the prosperity and development of urban economy. These factors lead to the emancipation of mind and the awakening humanity of Song people. These people strive for freedom and pleasure of mind and body and show their flying life through all things of creation. In the boundless universe, life is so short. Every detail of Song people's life is as ethereal and trackless as the footprints of wild geese on the slush. The melodious songs of life are created by Song people when they poetically dwell in the land due to their leisure state of mind. With the dissemination of Song Ci, these works will go back to ancient times, flowing in the spiritual river of generations. It collides with the wisdom and mind of later generations and will play a more pleasant melody of life.

References

Tang, G. Z. (1986). *Ci Poetry Series*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.

Zhou, Z. F. (1986). *Modern Translation of Wen Xin Diao Long*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.

Vol.1 No.12 2020
https://doi.org/10.37420/j.cer.2020.121

Wang, X. Q., & Ji, J. (2013). *Zhuangzi*. Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House.

Tuo. T. (1977). *History of Song Dynasty, Volume 338*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.

Tuo. T. (1977). *History of Song*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.

Egan, R. C. (1984). *The literary works of Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-72)*. Cambridge University Press.

Egan, R. C. (1994). *World, Imagine and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*. Harvard University Press.

Chang, K. S. (1980). The evolution of Chinese TZ'U Poetry: from late T'ang to Northern Sung. Princeton University Press.

Goodale, T., & Godbey, G. (1988). *The evolution of leisure: historical and philosophical perspectives*. Philadelphia: Venture Publishing. Inc.

Kelly, J. R. (1987). *Freedom to be: A New Sociology of Leisure*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.