



A Preliminary Look at the Poems in the Prosperous Tang Dynasty—Jian Bai Juyi's *Song of Eternal Sorrow*

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Abstract

In the Tang Dynasty, it was an unprecedented costume for the development of ancient poetry in China. There were 48,900 ancient poems recorded in The Book of the Whole Tang Dynasty alone. This does not include many lost ancient poems. Therefore, historians have been arguing about the number of ancient poems in the Tang Dynasty. According to the latest literature records, with the development of many new ancient books, the number of Tang poems has further increased. Among them, there is a first-hand narrative poem, which has become a famous love narrative poem in history with its rich and gorgeous rhetoric, melodious narrative techniques and well-known good sentences. It is Bai Juyi's *Song of Eternal Sorrow*. With its refined language, The *Song of Eternal Sorrow* has shaped the touching love story between Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty and Yang Yuhuan, the imperial concubine of the Tang Dynasty. It is a long narrative poem with 120 sentences, all of which are composed of seven-character rhythmic poems, which makes the poem itself look rhythmic and neat.

Keywords

Bai Juyi, *Song of Eternal Sorrow*, Poetry

1. The History of Poems in *Song of Eternal Sorrow*

1.1. A Song of Everlasting Regret

In the first year of Yuanhe in Tang Xianzong, Bai Juyi and his friends Chen Hong and Wang Zhifu visited Xianyou Temple near Mawei, mentioning Li Longji and Yang Guifei. Wang Zhifu believes that things like this will disappear with the passage of time if they are not polished. He encouraged Bai Juyi: "Lotte is deeper than poetry, and it is more than love. Try it as a song. Why not?" Therefore, Bai Juyi wrote this long narrative poem—*Song of Eternal Sorrow* (Hu Jiajia, 2020).

The *Song of Eternal Sorrow* was written in the first year of Yuanhe (AD 806). At that time, Bai Juyi was taking up the post of county magistrate in Liaowo County (now Zhouzhi, Shaanxi Province). It coincided with the visit of his best friend Chen Hong and Wang Zhifu, and several people were visiting Xianyou Temple. Feeling the love story between Yang Guifei and Tang Xuanzong, he wrote this poem here.

In the first year of Sui Renshou, Emperor Wendi Yang Jian of Sui Dynasty spent the summer in a temple. He immediately felt that the temple was warm in winter and cool in summer, and Emperor Wen of Sui felt that the local environment was beautiful, so he made an order to build a palace in the local area and named it Xianyou Palace. By the Tang Dynasty, Xianyou Palace had developed into three temples, one of which had disappeared in the long river of history, while the other two were still seen in the world and enjoyed fireworks. Because the two temples are divided on both sides of Heihe River, they are also divided into two temples, the one in the south is Xianyou Tem-

ple, which also becomes the South Temple. At that time, the articles that were born in Xianyou Temple included not only the song of everlasting regret, but also the biography of everlasting regret by Chen Hong. "Biography of Long Hate" records that in December of the first year of Yuanhe, Bai Juyi was a county magistrate, and he swam with Wang Zhifu and Chen Hong in Xianyou Temple. Because of his words and the love tragedy between Xuanzong and Yang Fei in the past years, he sighed and asked Bai Juyi to make a song to spread the story. Bai Juyi was ordered to write *Song of Eternal Sorrow*, "one song with long hatred and amorous feelings, and ten songs sung by Qin Yin".

Wang Zhifu believes that this sudden intention, as well as the one-stop work with no too delicate touch-ups, will soon dissipate in the long river of history. He told Bai Juyi, "Lotte is deeper than poetry, more than lovers, so try to sing it. What's the point?". Therefore, Bai Juyi, with the encouragement of his friends, wrote this song of everlasting regret, which has a long history, and made it.

1.2. The Long Hate of Life

The theme of Bai Juyi's *Song of Eternal Sorrow* has been mixed in history. Some people think that the *Song of Eternal Sorrow* reflects the beautiful and tactful love story between Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty and Yang Yuhuan at the prosperous time of the Tang Dynasty. Others think that Bai Juyi is actually borrowing his own writing style to pin his feelings in his works. Based on the textual research of literary writers and historians, we can find that Bai Juyi also has an unforgettable love story in his books, such as *A Survey of Bai Juyi's Genealogy and Family*, and *Years of Bai Juyi's Life*. The woman has been described several times in history, and people can only know that it is a woman named Xiang Ling, who runs through Bai Juyi's dull and long life (Dai Mengjiao, 2021).

In Bai Juyi's romantic life, there are *Pipa Xing*, which is entrusted to his friends, and *Selling Charcoal Weng*, which appeals to his heart. However, the most famous one is *Song of Eternal Sorrow*. In Bai Juyi's "praise", people who know him can always understand that the so-called "long hatred" and the so-called "while this unending sorrow goes on and on forever" are all due to the woman who can't be missed in her life. Bai Juyi once wrote stories such as "The Winter Solstice Night with Xiang Ling" and "Sending Xiang Ling" to express his thoughts about that girl. "Don't cry, sneak away, don't talk, secretly love each other, and no one knows about it except two hearts." Yes, the two hearts of Bai Juyi and Xiang Ling are unknown. He knows, maybe only someone of his own, Chen Hong.

Chen Hong once commented that Bai Juyi was "more affectionate than affectionate". Chen Hong knew Bai Juyi well. He knew that Bai Juyi's word "Lotte" was actually a mockery of himself. The word was Lotte, but it was not Lotte. Bai Juyi is the most unhappy person. The *Song of Eternal Sorrow* was written a few months before Bai Juyi got married. At that time, Bai Juyi got married with his unloved person because of family interests. He still missed Xiang Ling, but at this time he couldn't express his thoughts so vigorously. So, in the *Song of Eternal Sorrow*, he wrote "that we wished to fly in heaven, two birds with the wings of one, and to grow together on the earth, two branches of one tree. Earth endures, heaven endures; some time both shall end, while this unending sorrow goes on and on forever."

Bai Juyi is an affectionate wit, but there are seven recorded women who had feelings with Bai Juyi, including Fan Su and Xiang Ling, who are deadly. His love is strong and short-lived, perhaps because he can't find his own "sincere person" in the boundless world, so he can only express his feelings by writing poems (Liu Zixin, 2018).

2. "Hate" in the Poems of Song of Eternal Sorrow

2.1. The Hero's Hatred of National Subjugation

Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty once knew how to treat people well, and his rewards and punishments were clear. After he ascended the throne, he advocated culture and education, appointed Yao Chong, Song Jing and other sages, reformed the official position, rectified the official management, and made great efforts to make the national strength of the Tang Dynasty reach its peak, forming a prosperous situation of "every three years counts, and all nations are competing in Heluo". After the prosperity, he gradually became complacent and began to indulge in pleasure. "till a little child of the Yang clan, hardly even grown, bred in an inner chamber, with no one knowing her. But with graces granted by heaven and not to be concealed, at last one day was chosen for the imperial household. If she but turned her head and smiled, there were cast a hundred spells, and the powder and paint of the Six Palaces faded into nothing", in the face of such a stunning beauty, Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty favored her, indulged in beauty day by day, and ignored the state affairs, resulting in the declining national strength.

In order to please the imperial concubine, Li Longji tried his best. In order to cater to her preferences, Emperor

Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty selected more than 700 people to sew clothes for her. In order to let her eat her favorite litchi, he also ordered the opening of a tribute road from Lingnan to Chang'an, the capital city, so that litchi could be delivered to Chang'an in time. In order to curry favor with the emperor, the courtiers also fell in love with Yang Guifei, courting and fawning (Hu Lixion, 2020). Yang Guozhong, the elder brother of Yang Guifei, also rose to the top and became the prime minister of the Tang Dynasty.

The powerful country has gradually become a weak country that the rebels can break. Later, the rebels marched on and captured Chang'an, the capital of the Tang Dynasty. Before the fall of Chang'an, Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty fled in a panic. In Maweipo, the accompanying soldiers mutinied, killed Yang Guozhong, and forced Tang Xuanzong to hang Yang Guifei. In the evening of 2006, he was depressed and unhappy, and died on April 5th of the first lunar year in Baoying, aged 78. How regretful he should be when he saw the country break! As Li Yu said, "The small building had another east wind last night, and the old country couldn't bear to look back." I'm afraid the pain of national subjugation is unbearable for ordinary people. But he can only hide this hatred in his heart, "watching the country's different surnames and beautiful women die with hatred", just as Bai Juyi wrote "the Emperor could not save her, he could only cover his face, and later when he turned to look, the place of blood and tears". Bai Juyi spoke on behalf of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty, and wrote that when a generation of emperors faced the tragedy of the country's destruction, they could only regret their inability to return to heaven.

In the poem, Bai Juyi first wrote Tang Xuanzong's excesses, "...High rose Li Palace, entering blue clouds, and far and wide the breezes carried magical notes" and "of soft song and slow dance, of string and bamboo music, the Emperor's eyes could never gaze on her enough", which showed the extravagance of court life and the emperor's obsession with beauty, paving the way for the later "subjugation". After the outbreak of Anshi Rebellion, the people lived in dire straits. At this time, Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty did not show the boldness of vision that a generation of monarch should have, but fled in a hurry, regardless of the lives of the people. Emperor Xuanzong's debauchery led to "An-Shi Rebellion", which in turn led to the tragic end of the love between him and Yang Guifei. The maker of the tragedy finally became the hero of the tragedy, which is why Emperor Xuanzong of Tang Dynasty "hated".

2.2. The Heroine's Hatred of Hanging

According to legend, Yang Yuhuan is one of the four beauties in ancient China. She has the appearance of being truly beautiful, closing the moon and being shy. Bai Juyi wrote in his poem, "if she but turned her head and smiled, there were cast a hundred spells, and the powder and paint of the Six Palaces faded into nothing." In the end, such a beautiful woman was given death, and her fragrance disappeared.

In the 14th year of Tianbao, An Lushan rebelled against Yang Guozhong in the name of Qingjunbian. The following year, Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty fled to Shu with Yang Guifei and Yang Guozhong, and when passing through Mawei Post, the accompanying sergeant headed by Chen Xuanli unanimously demanded that Yang Guozhong and Yang Guifei be put to death. Emperor Xuanzong had to give Yang Guifei the death. In the end, Yang Guifei was given a white silk and hanged under a pear tree in the Buddhist temple at the age of 38. This is "the men of the army stopped, not one of them would stir, till under their horses' hoofs they might trample those moth-eyebrows" written by Bai Juyi in *Song of Eternal Sorrow*.

Once she was "if she but turned her head and smiled, there were cast a hundred spells, and the powder and paint of the Six Palaces faded into nothing", but now she is "flowery hairpins fell to the ground, no one picked them up, and a green and white jade hair-tassel and a yellowgold hair-bird". At the moment of death, she must have been unwilling. No more love, no more prosperity. In the poem, the "flower twinkle to appoint the land" creates a bleak atmosphere, and also shows the tragic situation after the death of Yang Guifei from the side.

She left with a grudge. "and the porcelain mandarin-ducks on the roof grow thick with morning frost, and his covers of kingfisher-blue feel lonelier and colder? With the distance between life and death year after year, and yet no beloved spirit ever visited his dreams." Through a series of fantasies, the poet expressed his tender and desolate yearning from the perspective of Yang Guifei. At the end of the poem, the poet used "earth endures, heaven endures; some time both shall end, while this unending sorrow goes on and on for ever" to point out the topic, taking care of the beginning and giving readers room for imagination.

In a word, Bai Juyi's *Song of Eternal Sorrow* is written around the word "hate", showing the psychological activities of the hero and heroine, which is full of artistic appeal.

3. Thickness of Poems in Song of Eternal Sorrow

Returning to *Song of Eternal Sorrow* itself, we will find that poetry alone is very thick. *Song of Eternal Sorrow* has very unique artistic features, mainly in the following aspects:

3.1. A Clever Combination of Emotion and Reason

Emotionally, *Song of Eternal Sorrow* expresses the love tragedy between Li Longji and Yang Yuhuan, so as to sing praises to the poignant love story at that time. At the same time, *The Song of Eternal Sorrow* also satirizes the social darkness at that time—it is precisely because of Tang Xuanzong's obsession with beauty that it led to the An-shi Rebellion. It can be said that Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty is lewd and misleads the country. On the other hand, Bai Juyi also expressed his sympathy for Bai Juyi and Yang Yuhuan in this poem. On the scene, Bai Juyi learned about the original feast of bliss, wine pool and meat forest, through constant investigation. In addition, this scene is described in poetry. The grand scene in the early stage and the scene of Ma Wei's change in the later stage are in sharp contrast, which not only expresses the cool thin of human nature, but also highlights the fickleness of the king. In terms of truth, the theme that *Song of Eternal Sorrow* wants to express is very clear. He just wants to be a metaphor for the rise and fall of the Tang Dynasty. It is Tang Xuanzong's obsession with beauty, not the beauty of Yang Yuhuan.

3.2. The Revelation of Life is Obvious

The *Song of Eternal Sorrow* is a long prose poem, in which the description of Yang Yuhuan is very tragic, and it was even later adapted into the film *The Legend of a Demon Cat* by director Chen Kaige. In the *Song of Eternal Sorrow*, the tragedy of human beings is vividly displayed, which is what I want to express by sitting down, trying to find an opportunity to get rid of my destiny and surpass my own destiny in Zhuang Zen's thoughts, so as to grasp the future thoughts (Li Yongli, 2021). This poem is Bai Juyi's own pursuit of freedom of destiny, and the characters are also very vivid. The narration of scenery is in perfect harmony, which makes this poem more romantic.

4. Conclusion

Song of Eternal Sorrow is a long narrative poem, and its lyrical elements are concentrated, which is a common sense created by Bai Juyi in his own narrative poem field. Bai Juyi's description of An Shi's rebellion, Ma Wei's change and his peaceful and chaotic return to Beijing, though not described in great detail, shows explicitly the turmoil of the dynasty and the cruelty of the war at that time in the description of Yang Guifei. Bai Juyi spent a lot of his pen and ink on Xuanzong's yearning for the imperial concubine, which made people memorable and thrilling. The whole poem uses one's own imagination to develop practice on a large scale, and creates a long narrative poem with extremely romantic color. Among Chinese narrative poems, *Song of Eternal Sorrow* is the peak and the swan song.

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