

# *Compatibility of "Zhe" and "Chang": On the Transformation of Huang Xieqing's Ci Style*

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**Abstract:** Huang Xieqing is renowned in the academic world for his "Yi Qing Lou Qi Zhong Qu", yet his "Yi Qing Lou Shi Yu" has received limited research attention. This paper aims to properly recognize Huang's achievements in Ci poetry. Known for his exceptional talent in Ci, Huang was celebrated in his time. Li Ciming regarded him as an outstanding Ci poet and a master of the genre. Huang was bold in his creations, ensuring each piece was "clear and logical," and he aligned with the Zhexi, "Zhe", Ci school. However, he also maintained a deep connection with the Changzhou, "Chang", Ci school. In the intertwined development of the "Zhe" and "Chang" schools, Huang emerged as a pivotal figure leading the late Qing Dynasty's Ci poetry towards an "upward path." Amidst the Ci schools, Huang innovated in Ci theory, employing the "theory of sustenance in other things" as a guide. He promoted aesthetic qualities of elegance, tameness, purity, composure, and vigilance, drawing inspiration from the Changzhou Ci school's "Implications and Significance of Words" theory. The 'subtle and gentle style' attributed to Lu Qian does not fully encompass Huang's Ci works. His later Ci pieces, infused with personal experiences and emotions, underwent significant stylistic transformations.

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary scholars have conducted limited research on Huang Xieqing's Ci poetry, particularly regarding its artistic style. This lack of scholarly attention has resulted in a low evaluation and frequent criticism of Huang's works. To thoroughly study Huang's Ci poetry and analyze the stylistic characteristics of Yiqinglou Ci, the research must be situated within the context of the social reforms of the mid-to-late Qing Dynasty. The aim of this paper is to identify the distinct artistic features of Huang's Ci works across different periods and to elucidate Huang's unique contribution to the history of Ci poetry.

## 2. Huang Xieqing's personal introduction and reason for writing ci

### 2.1 Personal Introduction

Huang Xieqing (1805-1864), originally named Xianqing and styled Yunshan (also known as Yunshan), later renamed Xieqing and styled Yunfu, was born in Wuyuan Town, Haiyan County, Zhejiang Province. Gifted from a young age, Huang excelled in various talents. He first gained fame

through his poetry, renowned not for boasting about his talents but for his outstanding literary skill. Reflecting on this period, he wrote self-deprecatingly in his poems, "Reading for the nation, treasures are somewhat cherished." Despite high regard in local examinations and being praised by discerning elders for his "profound and magnificent talents, destined to be an outstanding writer," he failed to pass the imperial examinations after multiple attempts. Consequently, he lost interest in an official career and turned to focus on travel, poetry, and literature. He became skilled in Ci writing, understood musical tones, and was proficient in calligraphy and painting. In his middle age, he witnessed the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion, events that deeply troubled him and led him to empathize with the sufferings of the common people. This period enriched his creative themes, "leading to the widespread popularity of his Yueh-Fu Ci, which was compared to that of You Dong."<sup>[1]</sup>

Huang was a significant Ci poet and scholar during the late Qing Dynasty, widely recognized in literary circles for his expertise in Ci writing. Zhang Bingkun praised his work, noting its ancient quality, endless flow, desolation, poignancy, colorfulness, profound rhythms, and exquisite beauty, reminiscent of Zhou Bangyan and Liu Yong, almost matching the caliber of Jiang Kui and Zhang Yan. Xia Zengchuan, in the preface to "Bing Mei Lou Ci Xu," commended Huang's Ci for its profundity, breadth, and finesse, embodying the essence of the great Northern Song poets. Since Emperor Daoguang's reign, Zhejiang's Ci poets have consistently lauded Huang's work. Liu Yifan, in the postscript to "Han Song Pavilion Ci Evaluation,": Huang significantly corrected the trend of rough and flashy Ci, restoring elegance and propriety, showcasing contemporary Ci writers' brilliance"<sup>[2]</sup>. Li Ciming praised Huang's way on reforming ci style, he called Huang "The true Ci poet", he said: "Reading Huang Yunshan's Zhuo Yi Garden ci poems....I said that its word simple, but the rhythm is fascinating, so-called the true Ci poet, master of writing ci. It's a very objective evaluation."<sup>[3]</sup> Yu Yue also noted that Huang Xieqing and others "were all part of the transformation in western Zhejiang."<sup>[4]</sup>

## 2.2 Reasons for Ci writing

Huang Xieqing was born into a poor family that held high hopes for him. However, his failure to succeed in the imperial examinations made his path to success fraught with difficulty. As he expressed in his poems, "I didn't pass the exam, after ten years of wearying wind and dust"<sup>[5]</sup>, he vividly portrayed the hardships of preparing for the imperial examination.

For a scholar from a humble background, the failure to achieve official recognition was especially hard to bear, leading to deep feelings of melancholy. Proficient in musical tones, Huang channeled his sorrows and frustrations into Ci writing, finding solace in the realm of Yueh-Fu Ci.

## 3. The style characteristics of "Yiqing Lou Shi Yu"

"Yiqing Lou Shi Yu", also known as "Zhuo Yi Yuan Ci," comprises four volumes and collects 227 poems. It was published in the sixth year of the Tongzhi reign (1867) by Huang's son-in-law, Zong Jingfan, with a preface by Zhang Bingkun, and was inscribed in Wuchang. Praised by his fellow disciples of the Zhejiang Ci School, Huang emerged as a representative figure of the late Zhejiang Ci School, following Wu Xiqi and Guo Lin. In his youth, Huang wrote many Ci poems which, influenced by his relatively peaceful life, often expressed leisurely sentiments with delicate craftsmanship and bore distinct traces of The Southern Song poetry. His poems covered a wide range of topics, including the Bhavana, farewells, lamentations of the past, descriptions of objects, dialogues, and excursions (Need action). However, after experiencing the turmoil of the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion, Huang witnessed chaos and upheaval firsthand, leading to a profound sense of frustration and a shift in his poetic style towards boldness with a hint of melancholy.

### 3.1 Early Ci style -- Expressing Sorrow ("Graceful Yet Profound in Theme," "Expressing Deep Emotions")

Ci, as a literary genre, has traditionally been characterized by its sentimental themes. Originating as a form of lyrical poetry, it was initially performed with music within the Yueh-Fu poetry tradition. During the Tang Dynasty, folk Ci often reflected themes of love and longing, facing criticism from orthodox literati. This criticism grew over time, culminating in the intense romanticism of the Five Dynasties' "Hua Jian School," which came to dominate the Ci landscape. Wen Tingyun was a pioneer of "Ci as a genre of elegance and beauty," characterized by its graceful and refined style. Later, Li Yu of the Southern Tang dynasty broadened Ci's scope, expressing deeper emotions and creating vivid scenes, thus "expanding the world of Ci." Wang Guowei remarked, "It was not until Li Yu that the horizon of Ci expanded, and the sentiment deepened, transforming Ci from a performance skill to an expression of the literati."<sup>[6]</sup> This marked a pivotal moment in the development of Ci, underscoring the genre's enduring focus on emotion. From its initial expressions of love and sorrow to later themes of homeland longing, Ci has consistently conveyed a profound sense of lamentation.

Huang Xieqing's early Ci works are quintessential examples of "Ci for expressing emotions," and rooted in sentiment, delicacy, and versatility. As suggested by Zhang Bingkun's preface to Ci, their style is reminiscent of Zhou and Liu or Jiang and Zhang's works, predominantly focusing on melancholic sentiments. However, Huang's articulation of sorrow builds upon his predecessors' innovations, encapsulating Chen Zilong's notion that "the essence of lyrical poetry lies in the expression of emotions."<sup>[7]</sup> Moreover, he aligns with the aesthetic principles of the Zhejiang School, valuing the Ci theories of Zhou Ji, Wan Shu, and Ge Zai, and ultimately carrying forward the Ci theories of Wu Xiqi and Guo Lin, thereby advancing the Zhejiang school's study of Ci.

Han Zi once said, "Words of joy are difficult to craft, while words of hardship are easily appreciated,"<sup>[8]</sup> affirming the importance of emotional authenticity in Ci poetry. Huang's tumultuous life, marked by hardships and sorrow, endowed his Ci with profound sentiments, making his early works predominantly melancholic and poignant. For him, the richness or poverty of life was not the pursuit of a Ci poet; rather, his greatest regret was the inability to enter officialdom and fulfill his patriotic ideals. Turning his overwhelming sorrows and frustrations into solitary reflections, he expressed these emotions amidst cups of wine and picturesque landscapes, finding solace in leisurely pursuits.

The works in "Yi Qing Lou Shi Yu" exhibit restrained elegance and aesthetic appeal, reflecting Huang's aesthetic orientation directly. Li Jia, a Qing dynasty Manchu ci critic, noted in his "Zuoan Ci Notes": "Huang Xianqing: 'The moon entwines itself, the flowers envy it; people are bored on their own, awake yet wanting to sleep, asleep yet wanting to wake, the lamp also burns with anxiety.' These verses are characterized by innovative and exquisite ideas, with themes sometimes implied, sometimes subtly expressed, exhibiting elegance and profound themes. However, they mostly belong to the refined and elegant style, lacking the boldness of Qing dynasty literati, which is regrettable." This commentary sheds light on the early works of "Yi Qing Lou Shi Yu." While Huang's writings about his personal travels may appear aimless, they are imbued with thoughts of friends and longing for home. His portrayal of unsuccessful attempts at officialdom and the bitterness of unfulfilled patriotic aspirations are veiled within scenes of 'self,' "drizzle," "autumn," "rain," and "dusk," intertwined with sighs of "cold," "loneliness," "sorrow," "lingering," and "overwhelming."

Is an example of his work: "Waves Washing the Sand: Autumn's Presence in the Banana Trees.":

"Autumn's touch upon the banana trees, not a hint of rain, just a breeze. In such a garden, cool and idle, the night pleases. The moon entwines, the flowers charm, yet I'm seized by ennui.

When will this parting sorrow cease? Recognize the scarlet silk, the phoenix kite's mournful cry, the distant message of the goose so bleak. Awake, I yearn for sleep; asleep, I'm restless— even the

lamp shares my unease."

This Ci unfolds as an epitome of elegance and nuance. It begins with romantic sentiments, introducing desolate autumnal feelings among the plantains and the sound of impending rain. The protagonist, a woman with "autumn in her heart," hears the faint rustling of the plantains, disturbed by the autumn wind. This sound contrasts with the tranquility of the courtyard, highlighting her inner desolation and solitude. Amidst boredom, she raises her delicate neck slightly; her eyes, reflecting the moonlight, seem to entwine with the moon in an affectionate embrace. Suddenly, the mention of "parting sorrow" furrows her brows, snapping her back to reality. She is "bored on her own," revealing her anguish over separation from her lover. As Wang Fuzhi observed, "Writing joy amidst sorrow, and sorrow amidst joy, makes it even sadder."<sup>[9]</sup> The "red silk" symbolizes the token left by her lover, a promise of eternal vows now separated by distance, leaving her only to reminisce. She wishes to convey her longing through the zither, yet its sound is bitter, and the letter is distant, evoking memories with each pluck of the string. In the final line, as she oscillates between wakefulness and sleep, the relentless burning candle mirrors her anxiety.

Wang Shizhen believed, "Ci must be graceful and magnificent...A single phrase can enrapture the soul, and a single word can elevate the spirit, with grandeur and boldness being secondary."<sup>[10]</sup> Despite its straightforward appearance, this Ci is "uncommonly subtle," demanding deep sentiment and skillful construction. It portrays "gracefulness" and "leisure," creating an atmosphere for readers, while also conveying "profound intentions" and "lonely embraces." The poet endows the protagonist with an independent personality, focusing on personal sorrows, suggesting that his own emotions may be interwoven.

Huang assimilated the essence of the Zhejiang School's graceful and tender style and the Changzhou School's characteristic of implicit expression. He followed the poetic trajectory of the profound beauty and lofty sentiments of Feiqing Ci and Li Yu's Ci, blending the styles of the Southern and Northern Song dynasties. Advocating for metaphorical expressions, these innovations laid a solid foundation for the flourishing of late Qing Ci studies.

### 3.2 Evolution of Ci Style—from Melancholy Romance to Profound Melancholy

Huang Xieqing made significant strides in innovating Ci poetry, yet his early works remained faithful to tradition, skillfully capturing the nuances of the sorrow of love. Grounded in the tradition of exquisitely expressing emotions, his approach was characterized by "a proficiency in conveying deep yet boundless feelings."<sup>[11]</sup> Early Ci style was profoundly influenced by Zhu Yizun, known as the "the old man by the bamboo forest," who retained the characteristics of a young wanderer, often appearing feeble and lacking vigor in his attempts to compose new sorrowful verses.

In his later years, Huang faced both Physical and psychological challenges. Externally, the turmoil of the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion raged on; internally, as a Ci poet living away from home, he grappled with personal struggles. As a humble Confucian scholar, he deeply empathized with the nation's plight and its people, experiencing numerous upheavals in his own life. His works broadened in content to reflect these tumultuous times, adopting a somber style to write about current events, infused with a sense of indignation and sorrow.

Firstly, from a linguistic perspective, Huang devoted considerable attention to refining his characters and sentences. He aimed to transcend the tender and glamorous atmosphere to some extent, showcasing two main styles: one exemplified by "Chang Shui Zhu Zhi Ci," characterized by its freshness, simplicity, and charming freedom, conveying sadness. The other style adopted a more somber tone, reflecting contemporary events and expressing his deep concerns about the country's future and the fate of its people, as seen in "Man Jiang Hong: Xu Shan Jian Shi" and "Man Jiang Hong: Ti Shi Ting Wu Mao Cai Qi You Cao." Huang often seamlessly incorporated phrases from past

sages into his verses, such as in 'shui Diao Ge Tou: Yue Ye Fan Zhou Zhi Hui Shan," directly borrowing from Su Dongpo's "When will the moon be clear and bright?" or in "Gao Yang Tai," echoing Du Mu's "In the Southern Dynasties, four hundred and eighty temples, how many pavilions amidst the mist and rain." These allusions, seamlessly integrated, expanded his expressive range, not confined to any specific era or individual. His craftsmanship became more refined, creating exquisite landscapes while conveying profound sentiments. Upon careful examination, it is evident that Huang had mastered considerable skill, blending theory with practice and continually improving Ci writing to imbue his Ci with a unique charm.

Secondly, in terms of content and atmosphere, his exploration became deeper and more profound. Due to life's vicissitudes and the unpredictability of worldly affairs, the poet's perspective expanded from personal emotions to encompass wandering fate, societal upheavals, the era's sorrows, and the people's hardships, reminiscent of Du Fu's concern for the country and its people. One category of his works consists of lamentations over the past, using historical anecdotes to reflect on the present, expressing sadness or dissatisfaction with reality. For example, "Yang Zhou Man: Ying Yuan Huai Gu" conveys sorrow and nostalgia while expressing disillusionment with the present. In turbulent times, with winds and rains raging, the poet's deep reflections on both ancient and contemporary history were interwoven with boundless sorrow, creating a melancholic atmosphere. Similarly, in "Bai Zi Ling: Shen Mang Tu Xia," the opening lines create an atmosphere of solemnity, with the word "(can) intensifying the solemnity and reflecting the poet's contemplation on aging. The last line, 'stroking his beard, he sighed thrice, wondering who among the four corners of the world is a true hero. ," elevates the theme, lamenting past heroes while expressing admiration and yearning, revealing the poet's inner melancholy and longing for achievements and contributions, regretting the missed opportunities of his later years. The entire composition exudes a heroic spirit, a sense of personal greatness, and concern for the common people's plight, as well as a lament for the rise and fall of history. This significantly expanded the utility of Ci, moving beyond the private language of love between men and women to sing the songs of the nation and the people with a bold spirit, displaying a "divine charm." Each line of the Ci contains heartfelt words, resonating deeply with the literati of the time, echoing the aspirations of scholars seeking peace in troubled times, truly embodying the "divine charm" of the era. With the establishment of this style, it indeed contrasts with Lu's previous evaluation of Huang's Ci as belonging to the category of 'subtle and gentle.'

It is widely recognized that a clear stylistic distinction exists between the early and later parts of "Yi Qing Lou Ci." While themes of heroism, grandeur, and national concern were not the primary focus of Huang—who predominantly expressed the personal sentiments of a feudal scholar—a shift in the later period of "Yi Qing Lou Ci" towards a greater emphasis on the nation's welfare and its people is evident. The scenes became more grandiose, and the sentiments deepened. Numerous Ci works exemplify this shift, including "Qiu Ji: Ti Ding Lan Shu Mao Cai Wen Wei Lan Ting Qiu Xi Tu," "Xi Yu Chun Man: Zhou Zi Yin Yuan Ke Jiang You, Gan Shi Yu Bie, Chang Chu Yu Huai," and "Bai Zi Ling: Zhu Huan Wu Yang." The atmosphere in these works grew more solemn and majestic, characterized by bold and vigorous strokes. The fragile image of the romantic scholar, previously laden with sorrows and emotions, underwent significant transformations in his later years. Huang shifted focus from mundane emotions to the broader concerns of a scholar burdened with the weight of the country, drawing inspiration from the poetry and Ci of Qu Yuan, Du Mu, and Xin Qiji."His words were imbued with spiritual depth, blending the Ci styles of the Northern Song, Zhou, Qin, and the Southern Song, exhibiting both delicacy and loftiness, clarity and depth."<sup>[12]</sup>"Yi Qing Lou Shi Yu" also radiates a strong sense of elegant refinement, presenting a comprehensive representation that embodies depth within shallowness, thickness within lightness, and strength within elegance.

## 4. Conclusion

Huang Xieqing, born in Haiyan, Zhejiang, was immersed in a profound cultural environment from an early age. He excelled in poetry, Ci, and prose, engaging deeply with many literary figures of his era. In his youth, Huang was intent on pursuing academic and official positions, and his early Ci works, created mostly for personal enjoyment, often reflected tender sentiments without delving into profound themes. These early pieces typically expressed frustration over his failure to secure an official position and served as an outlet for his personal sorrows. However, as his skills matured, his style underwent a significant transformation, evolving from grace and tenderness to emotional depth.

In his middle and later years, after witnessing the country's disintegration, his style shifted in a manner reminiscent of Qu Yuan, Xin Qiji, and Li Qingzhao, adopting a more heroic and bold tone. Huang came to believe that subtle and profound words were insufficient to inspire patriotic fervor. Consequently, he aspired to aid the world's people through his literary works, drawing inspiration from ancient heroes.

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