

Evolution of Poetic Composition Theories from *Shilin Shihua* to *Chengzhai Shihua*

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Abstract: Ye Mengde, a well-known Chinese poet and poetry critic in the Song Dynasty, advocated the concept of implicit naturalness in his work, *Shilin Shihua* (*Shilin's Remarks on Poetry*). He emphasized that the use of allusions in poetic composition should not be far-fetched and demanded that words and sentences be refined and hammered. Based on Ye's insights, Yang Wanli, another famous Chinese poet in the Southern Song Dynasty, further developed the theory. In *Chengzhai Shihua* (*Chengzhai's Remarks on Poetry*), he proposed that the essence of poetry lies in "poems being concluded while the taste remains eternal," paid attention to the skillful integration of idioms and allusions, advocated the importance of creating "stunning verses" in writing poetry, and practiced what he preached by actively engaging in poetic composition. He shattered the traditional conventions of the late Jiangxi School of Poetry, created the unique "Chengzhai Style" characterized by freshness and liveliness, and injected a vibrant "poetic taste" into poetry, enhancing the role of poetic composition theory in guiding poetry creation practices.

1. Introduction

"The tradition of offering commentaries on poetry had its origin in the Song Dynasties."^[1] Since the creation of Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi Shihua* in the Northern Song Dynasty, the style of shihua (remarks on poetry) was born and gained significant momentum thereafter. As a new style of poetry commentaries, it spread like wildfire and was quickly in vogue. The *Shilin Shihua* was compiled by Ye Mengde at the turn of the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties. Its poetics stemmed from the Jiangxi School of Poetry, which no longer focused on discussing poetry and poetic activities for casual conversation but took a theoretical turn. This shift represents a transition of Shihua in the Song Dynasty from "centered on activities"^[1] to "striking a balance between poetic activity discussion and verse analysis,"^[1] marking a significant milestone in bridging the past and the future. Yang Wanli, in the Southern Song Dynasty, also drew inspiration from the Jiangxi School of Poetry in his early years. However, he later experienced a moment of enlightenment and decided to get rid of the rigidity of the Jiangxi School of Poetry, creating the distinctive "Chengzhai Style" featuring freshness, liveliness, and rich spiritual interest. He emphasized the "taste" of poetry and articulated his views in the work titled *Chengzhai Shihua*. Both authors were influenced by the Jiangxi School of Poetry from the outset, but they later dismissed its influence and forged their own distinct styles. Although their theories on poetry were both fragmentary, Yang Wanli, delving more deeply than his predecessor, had engaged in specific arguments and discussions about poetry instead of mere subjective

judgments.

Many researchers have delved into the *Shilin Shihua* from diverse perspectives. For instance, the *Shilin Shihua* and *Jiangxi School of Poetry* written by Xia Yuandong, the *Research on Ye Mengde's Shilin Shihua* by Ying Zi, the *Research on the Poetic Thoughts of Ye Mengde's Shilin Shihua* by Bi Zhentao and the *Discussion on Shilin Shihua* by Deng Guojun explored the literary thoughts and poetics it encapsulated. Pan Shuxian's work, *Poetic Cases and the Political and Cultural Ecology of People in the Song Dynasty: The Mirror Image of Wang Wei in the Shilin Shihua*, and Rong Mo's work, *Poetic Theory Features and Selections of Poetry Paradigms in the Period of Nandu of Song Dynasty—Discussion on the "Intentional Disparagement of Yuanyou Poetics" in the Shilin Shihua*, on the other hand, examined the connection between the *Shilin Shihua* and political factions. Furthermore, Xu Mengmeng conducted a detailed analysis of the editions of *Shilin Shihua*, and Yu Qinghui, in her research titled *Acceptance of Liu Zongyuan's Poetry in the Song Dynasty—A Glimpse from Shilin Shihua*, incorporated the reception theory to shed light on the influence of Liu Zongyuan's poetry.

On the contrary, the research on *Chengzhai Shihua* mainly revolves around its poetic ideology, time of completion, and philological significance. For example, Li Guoping's *Exploration of Poetics in Chengzhai Shihua* studied Yang Wanli's poetics of "fictitious and realistic comparison" and "seven-character line expressing three meanings." Wei Xiangxue, in his study *A Brief Discussion on Chengzhai Shihua*, summarized Yang Wanli's poetic spirit of learning from predecessors, advocating innovation and individuality, and emphasizing the

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importance of preserving "lingering poetic tastes." In another study, Yang Xuedong explored the poetics, four-six style, and miscellaneous discussions of Yang Wanli. Additionally, Hu Jiansheng's *Textual Research on the Writing Time of Chengzhai Shihua* defined the time of completion and examined the poetic ideology of the work. Meng Dan, in her research titled *Investigating the Philological Significance of the Annotated Catalog of the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries through its Annotations of Chengzhai Shihua*, explored the philological significance of the work.

Currently, the comparative study of *Shilin Shihua* and *Chengzhai Shihua* is underreported. To bridge the gap, this paper attempts to conduct a detailed comparative analysis of the poetics contained in the two works by leveraging the systematic analysis method and macro comparison method, exploring the evolution of poetic composition theories from *Shilin Shihua* to *Chengzhai Shihua*.

2. Artistic Style: From Implicit Naturalness to Eternal Poetic Taste

Ye Mengde pursues a style of poetry that is restrained, implicit, and natural, and praises Zhang Jingxiu's poems in *Shilin Shihua* as "elegant and plain, with plenty of beautiful lines." Meanwhile, he strongly appreciates Du Fu's "The spring colors of Brocade River come to Earth and Heaven, drifting clouds over Jade Fort Mountain transform through present and past" and "I hear drear horns and drums announce the dawning day, mirrored in the Three Gorges, shivers the Milky Way," which are majestic, powerful, as well as profound and reserved in aesthetic conception, such that he laments "nobody is capable of creating such verses afterward." In contrast, he criticizes Wang Anshi's "All the people are anticipating the pouring rain, yet unaware if the dragon meanders here," "Amid lush and verdant leaves lies a lone red flower, this touch of red is enough to brighten the spring scenery," and "Cleansing the impurities of the mundane world with boundless merits, nourishing the scorched land with extraordinary talents" for being over straightforward and candid, thus losing the beauty of implicitness. Ye advocates that "Thoughts and words should be melded seamlessly, with words shifting in harmony with the changes of mind; the two are naturally intertwined."^[3] Such a proposition is aimed at converting the long-standing dull formalistic style of poetry caused by the sharp increase of argumentation and excessive reasoning in poetic composition during the Song Dynasties by calling for a clear and plain style. Although he has proposed an implicit and natural style of poetry by commenting on predecessors' poems, he has not specifically explained the methods through which poets can achieve the effect of "carved without leaving a trace" and "ingenious yet natural."

Upon the pursuit of the implicit nature of poetry, Yang Wanli seeks a "poetic taste."^[4] He inherits the theory of "taste beyond the taste" proposed in Sikong Tu's *Twenty-Four Styles of Poetry*, eulogizing "poems being concluded while the taste remains eternal" and insisting that poetry should have "infinite taste." He praised Tao Yuanming

and Liu Zongyuan's five-character poems for being "elegant and profound" and proposed that poetic composition should be euphemistic and implicit, expressing "taste beyond the taste" and "meaning beyond the textual descriptions." In this regard, he provides detailed arguments and discussions in *Chengzhai Shihua*:

Chapter 5:

"In the *Golden Needle Method*, it is stated that 'In an eight-line regulated poem, the closing line should be like a rolling stone down a high mountain, never to return.' I disagree with that. I believe 'poems being concluded while the taste remains eternal' is the most ideal. As Du Fu wrote in the poem *The Double Ninth*: 'I wonder who would still be around in next year's get-together, in inebriety I look carefully at a cornel leaf.' In *Declining an Invitation from Minister Li in Summer*, he expressed: 'It's not that I disregard the appointment with you, but the wild snow in Shanyin impedes the visit.' Such instances can also be found in Tang poems: 'Immersing Sword Gan Jiang in the Ge River, the sound of apes is heartbreaking.' In *Fishing Pier*, it is mentioned: 'Still there are anglers fishing in this river, who sell the fish in exchange for money.' And in *Nagato Complain*, it has 'Wrongly using gold to buy poetry, Sima Xiangru himself is a heartless person.' Cui Daorong commented: 'Now I envy Sima Xiangru's wealth, who at least resides within a four-wall room of the mundane world.'"^[2]

Chapter 6:

"There are poems with three meanings in a seven-character line. Du Fu says: 'I face my meal, take a bite, and then I can take it no more.' Han Yu says: 'Before arriving at the destination, I already contemplate returning.' There are also poems with two meanings in a five-character line. Chen Shidao says: 'Illness prevents solace in alcohol; internal coldness is already anticipated as the weather turns cold.' There are even poems without explicit words within the line but with implicit meanings beyond. In *Xiang Bo*, Su Gong rebukes Bo Gong's false accusations. Thus, he questions, 'As two travel together, who ultimately brings about this calamity?' Du Fu says: 'Dispatching someone to the market on credit for fragrant rice, calling his wife out of the kitchen to prepare a meal for me himself.' The previous sentence mentioned his poverty, hence the use of 'she'; later, it mentioned he has no one to command, thus the use of 'qin.' In another poem, 'Coming back from the east, I yearned for the road, but now I feel it is hard; about to part, I mount my horse, my body lacks all strength,' The previous sentence implies mutual connection without explicit mention, while the next sentence carries a lingering reluctance to parting without expressing it out. And in 'Gathering daily in joy for friendship and ale, this old fellow understands now for the first time,' he mocks himself for being left alone. Then, in *Declining an Invitation from Minister Li in Summer*, he says, 'Wild snow in Shanyin impedes the visit,' which explicitly mentions the hot weather but implies it."^[2]

In Chapter 5, Yang Wanli begins by refuting the assertion in the *Golden Needle Method* regarding the closing line in eight-line regulated poems, advancing the proposition that "poems being concluded while the taste remains eternal" is the most ideal, which means an

exceptional poem should achieve the state where the lines are completed, yet the poetic taste endures. Subsequently, he provides several exemplary poems, such as *The Double Ninth* and *Declining an Invitation from Minister Li in Summer*, to illustrate his point. Moving on to Chapter 6, he provides a more detailed supplement to the concept mentioned in Chapter 5 by enumerating verses that exemplify enduring poetic tastes and categorizes them into three forms: those with three meanings in a seven-character line, those with two meanings in a five-character line, and those without explicit words within the line but with implicit meanings beyond. He further interprets these examples, elucidating to the reader what constitutes the "taste beyond the taste."

In terms of artistic style, *Shilin Shihua* mainly centers on the artistic ideas of implicitness, blending sentiment with scenery, and naturalness, while Yang Wanli's *Chengzhai Shihua* directs more attention to the eternal poetic taste, namely the enduring meaning, apart from implicit naturalness.^[5] Yang emphasizes aesthetic perception and value beyond the verses in poetry, highlighting the perfect unity of words, meanings, and poetic tastes. He also provides specific instances to guide the analysis of the implicit meanings in the beautiful lines of predecessors, holding specific guidance for creative endeavors beyond the evaluation and appreciation of poetry.

3. Syntactic Skills: From "Refined Verses" to "Stunning Verses"

Within the spectrum of poetic syntax, Ye Mengde was influenced by predecessors' remarks on poetry, demanding that words and sentences be refined and hammered, preferring the use of unique words, reduplicated words, lively words, and other language forms, and pursuing the conformity of words, sentiments, and sceneries. Chapter 15 of *Annotated Notes on Shilin Shihua* says:

"The craftsmanship of a poet often manifests in a single word, a fact long recognized by people. Only in the verses of Du Fu does one find a myriad of changes, which are nearly elusive. Take the line 'Standing amid the mountains and waters of Bashu region, with its buildings tracing back to the Qi and Liang Dynasties' for instance. Thousands of miles and hundreds of years are condensed into the two words 'you' and 'zi.' Yet, with these simple words, the poem is imbued with a spirit that can conquer mountains and rivers and a broad mind that embraces both ancient and modern times, all subtly revealed beyond the textual descriptions. In the *Pavilion of Prince Teng*, he says, 'The pink wall still retains the hue of bamboo, from the empty pavilion, the sound of pine echoes.' If the words 'you' and 'zi' are not used, the remaining eight words can be employed for any pavilion, without the necessity of Tengwang. All these verses are spectacular to the extreme, beyond the reach of ordinary human effort. Only Du Fu, with ease and leisure, achieved this out of naturalness, without a hint of strain. Many contemporary poets blindly imitate the words he used, falling into rigid and unchanging patterns. They seem unaware of the subtleties of blending sentiment with scenery; as long as they touch

upon the crucial points, any words can be employed."^[3]

From the very outset, Ye Mengde has explicitly pointed out that "The craftsmanship of a poet often manifests in a single word." He then cites two couplets of Du Fu's poems as an example, elucidating that with the use of only two common empty words, the poet manifests a spirit that can conquer mountains and rivers and a broad mind that embraces both ancient and modern times. The verses "The pink wall still retains the hue of bamboo, from the empty pavilion, the sound of pine echoes" also employ empty words to describe objective scenes, highlighting the unique features of the Pavilion of Prince Teng. In addition to the use of unique words, Ye further elaborates on the use of reduplicated words, as seen in Chapter 21 of the *Annotated Notes on Shilin Shihua*:

"The most challenging aspect of poetry composition lies in the use of 'reduplicated words.' It is imperative to ensure that the spirit and vitality of seven-character and five-character poems are fully encapsulated within two reduplicated characters, so as to be considered ingenious. The claim that the phrase 'Above the paddy fields, a line of white egrets glides through the sky; in the grove, the melodious cries of yellow orioles resonate' was stolen by Wang Wei from Li Jiayou, as asserted by people of the Tang Dynasty, is not accurate. The brilliance of these two lines lies in the addition of the words 'mo mo' and 'yin yin.' These four words were skillfully added by Wang Wei after being inspired by Jiayou, demonstrating his appreciation for the poetic nuances. This is akin to Li Guangbi leading the army of Guo Ziyi, issuing a single command, and enhancing the brilliance several times over. Otherwise, the original verses are merely a description of scenery, something an ordinary person could compose. In a word, only sentences like Du Fu's 'Endless trees shed their leaves that descend in the whistling wind, unending, the long river comes on churning' and 'The river sky spreads far and wide, birds go off in pairs, in wind and rain always the dragon hums' can be considered extraordinary. Modern verses such as Wang Anshi's 'The new frost resembles the fair beauty by the water, pure and white; as night approaches, the distant mountain ranges often appear green,' and Su Shi's 'The rich scent of the stove has just begun to diffuse in the night, the gently swaying flower shadows intensify the spring sentiments,' can also be considered complementary to the earlier examples."^[3]

Ye Mengde first points out that the most challenging aspect of poetry composition lies in the use of "reduplicated words." He cites exemplary lines from Wang Wei, Du Fu, Wang Anshi, and Su Shi that employ reduplicated words to show that when reduplicated words are appropriately used, they can not only capture the external features of the landscape but also reflect the poet's senses and sensibilities. What's more, reduplicated words will contribute to the harmony of words and sounds in poetry, adding beauty to sound and rhythm. Therefore, Ye believes that when reduplicated words are properly used in poetry, it brings about a "spirit and vitality" to the poem, achieving the effects of being "exquisitely crafted," "transcendent," and "rivaling earlier works."

From the two chapters above, it is evident that Ye Mengde emphasizes the refinement of words in poetic syntax. To illustrate the opinions that "the craftsmanship

of a poet often manifests in a single word" and "the most challenging aspect of poetry composition lies in the use of reduplicated words," he systematically summarizes and elaborates on the refining of words and sentences in the works of predecessors. This reveals his recognition of meticulous craftsmanship in poetic syntax. Yang Wanli delves deeper on the basis of evaluating works by predecessors. From these evaluations, he deduces and extracts specific writing methods. In Chapter 7 of *Chengzhai Shihua*, for example, he first points out what constitutes a "stunning verse":

"Poetry has stunning verses. In Du's *A Folding Screen Painted with Landscapes*, he says, 'In a hall where maples shouldn't grow, A strange sight, the mist below the mountain goes aloft.' Again, in another poem, he says, 'If the cassia tree in the moon is cut down, the emitting limpid light should be brighter.' Bai Juyi says, 'Feeling sorry for the lone cassias bloom in distant heavens, I ask Heng'e if she wants to plant more. Fortunately, there are idle fields in the moon palace; why not plant two trees in the center?' In Han Ju's *A Painting of Mount Heng*, he says, 'A friend hails from Tianzhu Peak in Mount Heng, with hands, he carries the Shilin Peak and Zhurong Peak. Two peaks stretch for hundreds of miles; how can they fit in the modest luggage space?' This is inspired by Su Shi's 'I bring this stone back with me, in my sleeve lies the East Sea,' Du Mu's 'I would like to summon the giant from the east Longbo Kingdom, to reach the heavens and grasp the Big Dipper,' 'Standing atop Penglai, I scoop up the ocean, until the sea is dried and the bottom surfaces,' and Li He's 'Where Nüwa tempers stones to repair the sky, the stones break, Heaven in shock, and tickle the autumn rain.'^[2]

Here, Yang Wanli enumerates representative poems with fantastical and peculiar qualities. He not only elucidates what constitutes "stunning verses" but also provides examples illustrating that the "stunning" points lie in the poetry's unique imagination and unusual collocation. Examples include bold imaginations like "In my sleeve lies the East Sea" and "To reach the heavens and grasp the Big Dipper," as well as the use of novel collocation such as "If the cassia tree in the moon is cut down, the emitting limpid light should be brighter" and "Fortunately, there are idle fields in the moon palace, why not plant two trees in the center?" How can there be fields in the middle of the moon? These verses employ unique imagination to render ordinary things unfamiliar and unusual, creating the "stunning" effect. Apart from citing and commenting on "stunning verses," Yang also subtly explains how aspiring poets can create such verses.

Hence, in Chapter 12 of *Chengzhai Shihua*, he further analyzes the peculiarity of predecessors' poems:

"Regulated poems in the Tang Dynasty consist of eight lines with seven characters each. In a single poem, every line is remarkable, and within each line, every character is extraordinary, which is difficult for both ancient and modern authors. I once discussed this matter with Lin Guangchao, and he earnestly remarked, 'In our poetry collections, we should not refrain from composing several pieces.' For example, Du Fu's *The Double Ninth* says: 'As I age, I grieve over autumn and force myself to relax; a good mood comes on me today, and I have a full measure of delight with you.' The first line of this poem features

perfect symmetry. Moreover, it undergoes an instant transformation, initially expressing a sense of autumnal sorrow, then suddenly followed by self-comfort. The use of 'zi' in contrast to 'jun' is particularly poignant, where 'jun' refers to the other party, and 'zi' denotes the author. 'Embarrassed that with this thinning hair, my hat would be again blown off; one might ask a bystander to tease me, so I straighten up my cap' is reversing one thing into a couplet. Meng Jia's mishap of losing his hat is deemed graceful, whereas Du Fu's not losing the hat is also considered elegant. Reversing all the ancient poetry cases is the most ingenious technique. The third couplet is 'The Lan River comes from afar, falling from a thousand mountain streams, Jade Mountain's height matches the paired peaks in the cold.' When most poets reach this point, their vigor often wanes. Yet, this poem remains vigorous and erect, evoking the spirit of the entire piece; such achievement wouldn't be possible without extraordinary vigor of strokes. 'I wonder who would still be around in next year's get-together, in inebriety I look carefully at a cornel leaf,' on the other hand, is endowed with a profound and enduring meaning."^[2]

Here, Yang Wanli cites examples of seven-character, eight-line regulated poems in the Tang Dynasty. Through the perspective of Lin Guangchao, he analyzes where the "extraordinary" lies in Du Fu's poetry and what makes this "extraordinary" so enchanting. He then proposes that "reversing all the ancient poetry cases is the most ingenious technique" and gives a detailed discourse on how to compose "extraordinary" poetry and stunning verses, holding great theoretical guidance implications.

In terms of poetic syntax, *Shilin Shihua* emphasizes the refinement of words and characters. By citing and summarizing the subtle use of "unique words" and "reduplicated words"^[3] in the verses of predecessors, Ye Mende expresses his pursuit of refining characters and making sentences that "blend sentiment with scenery."^[3] On the other hand, Yang Wanli, in *Chengzhai Shihua*, introduces the concept of "stunning verses"^[2] in poetry. He not only critiques the masterpieces of predecessors but also distills from them two poetic composition methods: the "reversal" method and the "inversion" method. Moreover, he puts these methods into practice, applying the technique of inversion in his own poetic creations, such as "Spring arrives abruptly on the morrow, winter fades as midnight comes" in *Two Poems on the Eve of Start of Spring* and "Last year's grassroots, reborn in spring's gentle breeze; a path unseen in the past year is newly trodden to the desolate grave" in *Tomb-sweeping on Cold Food Festival*. This not only offers theoretical guidance to future poets but also constitutes practical poetic composition experiments.

4. Imitating Ancient Poets and Using Allusions: From "Not Being Far-fetched" to "Skillful Integration"

In *Shilin Shihua*, it is stated: "Having read the poems of predecessors extensively, when encountering phrases that bring delights, one tends to memorize them repeatedly, and over time, inadvertently misappropriates them as one's

own."^[3] Ye Mende cites examples of Wei Yingwu and Wang Anshi, highlighting the phenomenon of similarities between verses of predecessors and successors. In contrast, *Chengzhai Shihua* explicitly states, "Those who are new to poetry must study the good verses of ancient poets" and "some good verses of successors accidentally resemble those of ancient poets, while others are intentionally passed down by later generations."^[2] Yang Wanli provides examples illustrating instances where some predecessors surpass their predecessors, and some successors do not match their predecessors. He encourages aspiring poets to study the works of ancient poets, saying, "Those learning poetry can benefit from seeking excellent verses in the poems of Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian. By reciting and immersing themselves in these verses with deep understanding, they will have their own creativity naturally emerge when putting pen to paper."

The poetic theories of *Shilin Shihua* are embedded in its records and in dealing with the poetry of ancient poets. By listing ancient poems and commenting on them, Ye expresses his own poetic and literary thoughts. This is exemplified in Chapter 30 of *Annotated Notes on Shilin Shihua*:

"Du Fu's poems, *Sick Cypress*, *Sick Orange Trees*, *Withered Palms*, and *Withered Nanmu Tree*, all lament the events of the time. *Sick Cypress* seems to be composed for Emperor Ming of Tang, sharing a theme with *The Cuckoo: A Ballad*. *Withered Palms* employs analogy to portray the hardships of the people, as expressed in the text itself. In *Withered Nanmu Tree*, it says, 'It still holds provision for rafter and beam, Though its goals to reach wispy heights are gone.' This poem is likely written for individuals like Prime Minister Fang Guan. Only in *Sick Orange Trees* does Du Fu begin by saying, 'Too bad, indeed, that their fruits are so small, sour and sharp as the wild pear,' and in the end, he mentions the hardship people suffered for lychees, likely referring to those who have encountered setbacks. Since the Han and Wei periods, poets have demonstrated profound intentions while maintaining the classical style. Du Fu, in particular, goes beyond the confines of refining language, embodying this tradition."^[3]

This commentary evaluates four poems of Du Fu, *Sick Cypress*, *Sick Orange Trees*, *Withered Palms*, and *Withered Nanmu Tree*, believing that these poems all reflect real-life experiences, expressing Ye's praise for Du Fu's poetry and affirming the poetic ideology based on social life. However, Ye Mengde also criticizes Du Fu's *Eight Laments*, as stated in Chapter 23 of *Annotated Notes on Shilin Shihua*:

"However, the *Eight Laments* are not masterpieces created concentratedly, yet many people refrain from discussing them out of reverence and a lack of understanding and appreciation. The shortcomings probably lie in the excessive verbosity. For example, in the poems lamenting Li Yong and Su Yuanming, there are many excessively verbose sentences. I have once ruthlessly edited them, retaining only half, in an effort to achieve perfection. Nevertheless, such words cannot be spoken by those who are unaware of these problems."^[3]

Ye Mengde points out the "excessive use of verbose sentences" in the two poems that lament Li Yong and Su

Yuanming, criticizing them for not achieving conciseness and beauty. From these two examples, it can be observed that *Shilin Shihua*, while admiring the poetic styles of ancient poets, confines its commentaries to the author's perspectives on poetry creation and critiques of earlier poets. It does not offer guidance on how beginners should study ancient poetry and engage in poetry composition. In contrast, Yang Wanli, in *Chengzhai Shihua*, provides specific arguments and discussions on how to learn from ancient poets, serving as an exemplary work for aspiring poets. An example can be found in Chapter 8 of *Chengzhai Shihua*:

"The five-character regulated poem, praising merits and virtues, demands utmost elegance and grandeur. For instance, Du Fu wrote: 'Phoenix calendar, Xuanyuan's time calculations, the dragon has taken flight for forty years. To the encircling wilds was opened a realm of long life, the Single Force turned the Great Potter's Wheel.' Another example from Du Fu is: 'Its sapphire tiles lie outside the first chill, its golden pillar is beside the One Vapor. Mountains and river support finely wrought windows, sun and moon come close to its carved beams.' Li Shangyin also states: 'The emperor established the capital, and immortals opened up a celestial palace. With outstanding individuals upholding truth, the essence of Heaven and Earth draws down the very night.' As for seven-character regulated poems praising merits and virtues, Du Fu and Jia Zhi jointly compose *Dawn Court at Daming Palace*, which also embodies elegance and grandeur. Among those who responded to this poem, Cen Shen's verses, 'The colors of flowers intertwine with the gleam of the sword, with morning stars just faded away, banners lightly brush against willow branches, with dewdrops lingering on the branches' stand out as the best."^[2]

Chapter 9:

"Seven-character long regulated poems, such as Du Shaoling's *Song of a Painting*, *Pictures of Horses by General Cao*, and *Song for the Painted Landscape Screen of Liu Dan*, *Sheriff of Fengxian*, are majestic and grand and difficult to capture. Those learning poetry can benefit from seeking excellent verses in the poems of Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian. By reciting and immersing themselves in these verses with deep understanding, they will have their own creativity naturally emerge when putting pen to paper."^[2]

Chengzhai Shihua points out what characteristics different poetic forms should possess. For example, five-character long regulated poems should be elegant and profound, which can draw inspiration from the works of Du Fu and Li Shangyin. Seven-character long regulated poems should be majestic and grand, which can refer to the above three poems by Du Fu. Ye encourages aspiring poets to seek out these characteristics in the poetry of Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian, thoroughly reading and deeply appreciating the nuances. By doing so, they are able to produce excellent works when composing poetry.

Regarding allusions, Ye Mengde emphasizes in Chapter 26 of *Annotated Notes on Shilin Shihua* that "the use of allusions should not be far-fetched; they must be used only when necessary." He compares verses from Su

Shi and Wen Tingyun, stating that Su Shi's "Unintentionally, the sun slants after the year of Gengzi, suddenly, I'm startled to find the year has reached Sichen" is adorned with allusions without artificial embellishment, displaying a natural and innate beauty. On the other hand, Ye Mengde criticizes Wen Tingyun's thought that "Sitting in quiet meditation throughout the night with the ascetic, I often hear urgent matters emanating from the west" for appearing contrived in its use of allusions. Ye Mengde cites examples of allusion usage in poems, expressing his own judgment on whether the allusions are employed well or not. However, he does not provide theoretical guidance on how to use allusions.

Yang Wanli attaches great importance to the skillful integration of idioms and allusions in poetry, proposing that "Utilizing the language of ancient predecessors rather than adhering strictly to their intended meanings is the most ingenious technique." He points out that the use of allusions should be flexible and adaptable, thus avoiding rigidity. He further categorizes the methods into "reversal" and "inversion." He believes that the "reversal" method can make poetry more subtle and enchanting, considering it as a technique that poets should master in the study of poetry.

As for the method of "reversal," Yang also presents multiple clear examples in his work. In Chapter 12, for instance, he states, "Embarrassed that with this thinning hair, my hat would be again blown off; one might ask a bystander to tease me, so I straighten up my cap' is reversing one thing into a couplet." Meng Jia's mishap of losing his hat is deemed graceful, whereas Du Fu's not losing the hat is also considered elegant. Reversing all the ancient poetry cases is the most ingenious technique." In Chapter 15, he cites Huang Tingjian's "Heaven and Earth serve as the canopy and bumper" and "Unable to produce two or three volumes" and Su Shi's "The carriage canopy need not be tilted" and "A whip is available but unused, opting instead for a papyrus whip" as examples of transforming allusions. He cites Su Shi's adding the phrase "why bother" before Du Fu's "At once I recall the past, how autumn wells caved in," explaining how to "utilize the language of ancient predecessors rather than adhering strictly to their intended meanings." Finally, he concludes with Liu Jingming's poetry as a successful case for learning the "reversal" method. In Chapter 13, he points out that "inversion" is a particularly ingenious technique for poets, providing several examples such as "The snow-white tea froths swirl when boiling, pouring it resembles the wild wind in a pine forest," "Sweet-smelling rice, pecked the last, for parrots, the grains; sapphire tung trees, perch of old, the phoenix's branches," and "With an empty stomach, though, I am unable to drink three bowls; sitting here, I listen to the long and short night watchman's bells in the mountainous city." These examples illustrate the charm of inversion, allowing readers to savor the infinite flavors of this technique.

Regarding imitating ancient poets and allusion usage, Ye Mengde, in *Shilin Shihua*, expresses his poetics by citing examples of ancient poetry, briefly illustrates his views on ancient poetry and allusions, and makes commentaries. In comparison, Yang Wanli's *Chengzhai Shihua*, building upon the evaluation of ancient poetry,

delves deeper into exploring how to study the poetic composition methods of ancient poets. In addition, he systematically summarizes the ancient poets' ingenious techniques for employing allusions with illustrative examples and detailed analysis, serving as critical guidance for novice poets.^[7]

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of artistic characteristics of poetry, Shilin Shihua has delved into some critical theoretical issues of poetic composition, including the relationship between content and form, as well as the artistic mindsets and rules of poetry. However, it primarily conveys the author's personal poetics or critiques of poetry by giving examples. By contrast, Yang Wanli's *Chengzhai Shihua* is more instructive and exploratory. Building upon the poetic theoretical foundation of *Shilin Shihua*, it digs more deeply into exploring how to learn the poetic style of ancient poets and elevates the artistic style of poetry from implicit naturalness to the level of "eternal poetic taste." Additionally, it puts forward that poetry should have "stunning verses" and "utilize the language of ancient predecessors rather than adhering strictly to their intended meanings," and provides guiding specific suggestions for beginners on how to write poetry. Yang Wanli himself also breaks the shackles of the Jiangxi School of Poetry and creates the "Chengzhai Style"^[6] characterized by its freshness and liveliness, reflecting a valuable spirit of exploration in summarizing predecessors' poetic composition experience, inheriting the traditions predecessors' poetics, and researching poetry theories.

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