

## The Ideal Image of Man of Ancient Chinese in Shi Jing (詩經)

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### Abstract

*It is a universal phenomenon for people to establish ideal images of man according to a specific time, society and race. Thus, people have invested endless endeavor to reach the standard of ideal image. Especially, they made efforts to embody the ideal image of man as a perfect human image using appearance feature like a human body and clothing. Shi jing (詩經) is considered as a very valuable source book which reveals the life style, customs, thinking, ideas, and emotion of people of that period. The purpose of this study is to analyze the ideal image of man and woman which ancient Chinese pursued, focusing Shi jing(詩經). The results are as following. The ideal image of man is nice, handsome, dignified, generous and gentle. Besides, he should have adequate sense of humor, tall height, clear eye, broad forehead, moderate and upright behavior, outstanding horsemanship and marksmanship and braveness. Meanwhile, the ideal image of woman was described as gentle, decent, and graceful. Also, she should have tall height, light complexion, pretty hand, long neck, broad forehead, clear eyes, and charming black hair. The ideal beauty of woman included nobility and elegant personality in addition to the good physical appearance.*

*Key words : Shi Jing, ideal image of man and woman, ideal beauty, ideal feature.*

### I. Introduction

Looking back upon the human history, it is a universal phenomenon for people to establish different ideal images of man according to a specific time, society and race. Thus, people have invested endless endeavor, infinite energy, much time, and unaccountable commodities in order to reach the standard of ideal image. However, the established unique ideal image of man exists only in their brain and mind. It may be impossible to reach the ideal image in actual life. In spite of having recognized the fact, people continuously pursued the ideal image of man, and tried to enhance and achieve it.

The ideal image of man and the standards for

it have personal, social, and cultural differences. In addition, it may vary according to race, ethnic group, natural environment, and region, as well as era, time, national traits. And ideal, morality, and values pursued by the whole society are another factors which affect the ideal beauty. These complex factors specify the ideal image of man in particular time, society, race, and ethnic group.

The mankind have used various methods to reach the ideal image of man which they have pictured in their mind for a long time. Especially, they made efforts to embody the ideal image of man as a perfect human image using appearance feature like a human body and clothing.

Besides the factors mentioned above, development of science and technology, economical level,

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availability of materials, and cultural level of the society are also important decisive factors for the beauty of human body and clothing as well as the ideal image of man.

In Shi jing (詩經), though it is fragmentary, considerable materials about general clothing culture of ancient Chinese are described. Shi jing (詩經) is peasants' folk song sprung up from vivid life experience of Zhou (周) people. Although limited, Shi jing is considered as a very valuable source book which shows or reveals the life style, customs, thinking, ideas, and emotion of people of that period.

This study analyzed the ideal image of man which ancient Chinese pursued, focusing Shi jing (詩經). The analysis is divided into two parts, the ideal image of man and woman, for convenience.

## II. The Ideal Image of Man

The ideal image of man ancient Chinese kept in mind can be found at the following record of Shi jing (詩經). That is, Wei feng gi ao (衛風 淇奧) (Kim, 1988) which is one of poems in Shi jing (詩經) shows that Wu-Gong of Wei (衛) was respected by people as he ruled over the country with virtue. Also, it is written in Gi feng Yi jie (齊風 猗嗟) (Kim, 1988) that people of Gi (齊) praised Zhuang-Gong of Lu (魯) for his outstanding appearance and marksmanship.

In Shi jing (詩經), there are several poems related to hunting which is clearly shown as a part of the important life for ancient Chinese. Really good-looking, benevolent, loving, and valiant man is described in Zheng feng shu yu tian (鄭風 叔于田) (Kim, 1988), and a man with distinguished marksmanship, horsemanship, alertness, and brave spirit is shown in Zheng feng da shu yu tian (鄭風 大叔于田) (Kim, 1988).

According to such poems as Wei feng gi ao (衛風 淇奧) mentioned above, the ideal man is described as dignified, thoughtful, handsome, generous, composed, and humorous but not too much. Also he is refined like being planed, trimmed, chiseled and polished.

The idea image of man in Gi feng Yi jie (齊

風 猗嗟) is described as a valiant and smart man with tall height, handsome appearance, clear eye, broad forehead, composed manner, gentle gait, moderate behavior, outstanding horsemanship, alertness, and prominent marksmanship. In Bei feng jian xi (北風 簡兮) (Lee, 1986), the image of dancing warrior who is brave, manly, sturdy, and with good horsemanship is expressed.

A gentle husband like a jade is described in Gin feng xiao rong (秦風 小戎) (Lee, 1986) which is considered as a poem about longing for a husband who left for war with military prestige. Comparing nice and beautiful appearance to a flower or jade is not confined to women. In Shi jing (詩經), sometimes, man is compared to a flower and jade, too. We can find that a manly lover who is a high officer is compared to a flower and jade in Wei feng fen ju ru (魏風 汾沮洳) (Kim, 1988). Shao nan gao yang (召南 羔羊) (Kim, 1988) is an another poem which shows a composed and splendid looking dignitary who walks calmly and slowly. In Gi feng lu ling (齊風 盧令) (Kim, 1988), a fairly good man is appeared as kindhearted, thickly bearded and handsome man with soft hair.

As we have investigated, the ideal image of man in ancient Chinese may be concluded as following. Namely, he has handsome appearance, and also possesses the virtue of not only a man but also a human being. That is, he is a person with perfect personality and the image of whole man.

## III. The Ideal Image of Woman

As there is little difference of meaning between the ideal image of woman and that of beauty, I would like to examine the ideal image of woman in Shi jing (詩經).

Shao nan he bi nong yi (召南 何彼穠矣) (Lee, 1986) is a poem which celebrates a marriage of the feudal lords' son of Gi (齊) and the princess of Zhou (周), the granddaughter of king Ping (平). This poem compares the beauty of bride to peach blossom. Shao nan he bi nong yi (召南 何彼穠矣) was written between B.C.770-B.C.720. It is a valuable material assuming the time when

Shi jing (詩經) was written. By this material, we can estimate how long the beautiful woman has been compared to a flower.

In *Yong feng jun zi xie lao* (庸風 君子偕老) (Lee, 1986), a noble and beautiful woman and her clothing are expressed. This poem is told to satirizes unsteadiness and disorder of Xuan-jiang, a woman of Wei (衛), but it rather seems to praise her beauty throughout all the lines. The concept of the ideal beauty image presented in this poem is different from that of *Shao nan he bi nong yi* (召南 何彼禮矣), the beauty like peach blossom. That is, she is rather mature and has great personality. In other words, the ideal image of beauty presented in *Yong feng jun zi xie lao* (庸風 君子偕老) is gentle, decent, graceful and noble woman rather than brilliant woman like a full blossomed flower. Her black hair like a cumulus emphasizes elegance and mildness; broad forehead indicates intelligence, grace and refinement; light complexion means noble class; and clear eyes stand for good personality. This type of woman was considered as a true beauty in Zhou (周) period.

*Yong feng jun zi xie lao* (庸風 君子偕老) indicates that true beauty is composed of not only beautiful appearance but also becoming clothing and adornments. Namely, the ideal image of beauty in the ancient Chinese was the beauty of good personality harmonizing beauty of human body and clothing.

An interesting point in this poem is that the ideal beauty is too beautiful to be compared to emperor and the Lord of Heaven. She is depicted as the most beautiful woman in heaven as well as on the earth. However, as the poems above mentioned give limited information about the ideal image of beauty in the era, we still have no idea about the ideal physical appearance. For example, it is not recognized clearly whether a tall woman is preferred or not. Further investigation on another poems will give the answer of the these inquiry to some extent.

Zhuang-gong in Wei (衛) got married to Zhuang-jiang, sister of De-chen who is the prince of Qi (齊). Zhuang-jiang was beautiful and kindhearted. But, Zhuang-gong was infatuated with mistresses,

and Zhuang-jiang felt lonely even without children. It is told that *Wei feng shuo ren* (衛風 碩人) (Kim, 1988) was written by people of Wei (衛) who sympathize Zhuang-jiang. Nevertheless, sympathetic context is not found. Merely beautiful appearance of Zhuang-jiang when she came to Wei (衛) from Qi (齊) to marry Zhuang-gong, and magnificent wedding ceremony are shown. In this poem, beautiful dresses and appearance of Zhuang-jiang are described somewhat in a concrete way (Kim, 1990).

Broad forehead and clear eyes are essential to the beauty as we see in *Jun zi xie lao* (君子偕老). In *Shuo ren* (碩人), broad forehead and eyes of which black and white parts are distinguished clearly are shown to depict the beauty. And the fact that these two are requisites for the ideal image of man were already studied in *Qi feng yi jie* (齊風 猗嗟). Strapping height is appeared as requisite for the ideal image of both man and woman (齊風 猗嗟, 衛風 碩人).

The common requisite for physical appearance of ideal beauty in *Yong feng jun zi xie lao* (庸風 君子偕老) and *Wei feng shuo ren* (衛風 碩人) may be concluded as fair and light complexion, broad forehead, and clear eyes. This ideal image of beauty in *Shi jing* (詩經) coincides with the physical appearance of today's beauty image in some extent over several thousands years.

The woman shown in *Wei feng shuo ren* (衛風 碩人) wears silk dress as which are considered as the most precious and beautiful dress for women in Zhou (周). The point is that the beautiful woman's appearance is enhanced and completed by wearing pretty dresses and ornaments over the human body. That is, the perfectly beautiful woman becomes when good physical appearance and beautiful dress and adornments are fused together and harmonized each other.

Body and face image of beauty at that time can be guessed by both *Chen feng yue chu* (陳風 月出) (Kim, 1988) and *Ze pi* (澤陂) (Lee, 1986) which is a poem about a missed lover. In *Ze pi* (澤陂), strapping height is shown concretely. Additionally, smart, pretty, wonderful and graceful feature can be seen at the same time.

In *Zheng feng you nu tong ju* (鄭風 有女同車)

(Lee, 2004), the face of a sweetheart are compared to the rose of Sharon. The example in which beauty of a woman is compared to a flower is already described in Shao nan he bi nong yi (召南 何彼禛矣). In the literature, the beauty is compared to peach blossom.

You nu tong ju (有女同車) seems a poem about a husband who is thinking the moment when he and his wife ride a coach. This poem may be thought as a lewd one, but the comment that a bridegroom praises the beauty of his bride looks reasonable. The fact that a woman wears beads of jade around the waist indicates that she is formally attired.

Fine dresses of a woman are described in Gao feng fu you (曹風 蜉蝣) (Kim, 1988), too. That is, a thin, transparent, and splendid dress and a white dress like snow may emphasize erotic and sexual attraction of the woman.

Until now, we have analyzed the ideal image of woman described in Shi jing (詩經). The ideal image of woman is summarized as the beauty harmonized both with ideal physical appearance at that time and noble, elegant, gentle, generous and benevolent personality.

#### IV. A Metaphor on the Ideal Image of Man and Woman

In Wei feng gi ao (衛風 淇奥), the ideal image of man is described as the man who cultivates his virtue, pursues his studies, and possesses benevolent personality. Also, Wei feng fen ju ru (魏風 汾沮洳) shows a metaphor which compares a beauty to a jade. And Qin feng xiao rong (秦風 小戎) compares jade to benevolent personality.

Ancient Chinese used a jade or metal as a metaphor on virtuous and gentle personality. It means that they treasured a jade very much. The fact may be proved through their thought that there is five virtues in a jade.

It is common in both man and woman to compare beauty to a flower. Graceful woman is also compared to a mountain or a river (鄘風 君子偕老) which means that the grace of beauty is grave and generous like a mountain, and is spacious

like the Yellow river. A beautiful woman is compared to the Lord of heaven (鄘風 君子偕老), the peach blossom (召南 何彼禛矣), or a rose of Sharon (鄭風 有女同車).

#### V. Conclusion

This study characterized the ideal image of man and woman in ancient China by analyzing Shi jing (詩經). The results are as following. Through analyzing content of Shi jing (詩經), this study discovered the ideal image of man which ancient Chinese wished to achieve in relation to their life style, desires and values, social virtues, historical background, and socio-cultural environment.

The ideal image of man which ancient Chinese wanted to reach was based on their actual life, and the ideal beauty the society wished to establish was added to the desire of everyday life. In some instance, while there may be differences between the ideal image of man and woman the ancient Chinese sought after, some common ideal features are also discovered.

The ideal image of man found in this study is as following. The physical appearance of him is nice, handsome, dignified, generous, gentle, and fine. Besides, he should have adequate sense of humor in addition to them. Also, tall height, clear eye, broad forehead, thick and nice beard, moderate and upright behavior, outstanding horsemanship and marksmanship, quickness, braveness are added to the ideal image of man. In sum, the ideal image of man that the ancient Chinese pursued is a man who was endowed with distinguished personality internally as well as remarkable physical appearance. And he should be a man of masculine virtue and ability.

Meanwhile, the ideal beauty of woman was described as gentle, decent, and graceful. In addition to them, it included such features as tall height, delicate and light complexion, pretty hand, elegant and long neck, broad forehead, beautiful eyebrows, clear eyes, and charming black hair. The ideal beauty of woman, like that of man, included nobility and elegant personality in addition

to the good physical appearance.

A common features between the ideal image of man and woman are the balanced and harmonized image, which includes not only outstanding acsthetical requisite according to each sex but also inner virtue and good personality. It is very interesting to discover common and universal ideal image of man between what ancient Chinese have pursued in Shi jing (詩經) and what modern society people with various cultures pursuit.

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