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## A Case Study on the Research of Social and Cultural Traditions in the Song Dynasty China of International Sinology

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjahss.2013/vol11n103148>

Published October 28 2023

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**Citation:** Ying W. (2023) A Case Study on the Research of Social and Cultural Traditions in the Song Dynasty China of International Sinology, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.11, No.10, pp.31-48

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**ABSTRACT:** *International Sinologists paid early attention to the Pu Lu works that originally existed as scientific and technological text, but constructed an unique pedigree of knowledge with scientific, political and humanistic implications, also coursed the innovative practice of style. The most outstanding representative figure in this field is professor Ronald Egan of East Asian Department of Stanford University in the United States. Ronald Egan is one of the early scholars who started from the cultural background of the times, focused on the study of flower planting in song Dynasty as an aesthetic existence, and deeply explored the cultural context and cultural thoughts in the works of "Pu Lu", reflecting the outstanding frontier and creative analysis. He investigated the relationship between the space, scholars and abundant natural resources in the works of Pu Lu in the Song Dynasty. He carried out an in-depth exploration of the self-contradictory argumentation in the works of Pu Lu in the Song Dynasty, he thus achieved an insight into the constraints of cultural tradition.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ronald Egan; botanic pedigree; cultural tradition; diabolic tricks and wicked craft; ritual restriction

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### INTRODUCTION

Ronald C. Egan is a famous US sinologist and an authority of the study on the Song Dynasty in the contemporary international sinological community. He used to be the dean of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Stanford University, and a sinology chair profession of Confucius Institute. When he was 19, Egan started to learn Chinese from Mr. Bai Xianyong(白先勇, 1937- ), and was admitted into the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations of Harvard University to study Chinese literature in 1971. In his early time, Egan studied *Tso Chuan*, and gained his doctorate from Harvard with a thesis titled *Tso Chuan: Analysis of Selected Narratives*. He was a former professor and dean of the East Asian Languages and Cultures Department of University of California, Santa Barbara, and he was also a professor of Department of Comparative Literature. He

has published many works: *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters by Qian Zhongshu* (Harvard University Press, 1998); *The Literary Works of Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-72)* (Cambridge University Press, 1984); *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Harvard University Press, 1994); *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Harvard University Press, 2006); *The Burden of Female Talent: The Poet Li Qingzhao and Her History in China* (Harvard University Press, 2014); and chief writer of Chapter Northern Song Dynasty for *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). His main study areas are literature, aesthetics and scholarly culture in the Song Dynasty. <sup>①</sup>

His study on the literature and idea in the Song Dynasty has wide horizons, profound exploration, unique insights and prominent achievements. This article will evolve around his most special spotlights in the study on the Song Dynasty - Ouyang Xiu, botanic pedigree and their relationship with scholarly culture in the Northern Song Dynasty.

Egan has a special emotion for Ouyang Xiu, the outstanding representative of scholars in the Northern Song Dynasty. He is deeply convinced that Ouyang Xiu occupied a brilliant position in a number of cultural fields. In his works, Egan said, "Ouyang Xiu, played a formative role in the history of at least three of the fields under consideration. In fact, Ouyang was also a key contributor to the development of the song lyric in mid-century. In other words, the trajectory of the history of each of my topics passes through the life and creative energies of a single individual. Moreover, that same individual is generally recognized as being mentor to and important influence upon several leading figures of the generation that succeeded his. Certain of these younger men likewise figure prominently in more than one field dealt with here."Therefore, Egan has made deep exploration for Ouyang Xiu, and comprehensively examined his groundbreaking merits in a number of fields.

In Chinese history, as an authority of literature and culture in the Song Dynasty and a famous writer esteemed for a thousand years, Ouyang Xiu made innovative changes in many cultural fields and was highly recognized by his contemporaries and people of later generations for his lofty and righteous personality. In the famous *Funeral Oration for Ouyang Wenzhong*(*Ji Ouyang Wenzhong Gong Wen*) written by Wang Anshi (1021-1086, a famous politician and literati of the Song Dynasty), the author stated, "Why should I feel sad for such a great life that makes you famous and highly recognized both before and after death? For your lofty character, profound knowledge and brilliant learning, you always enjoyed a marvelous fame in articles and discussions as a renowned and celebrated master. The knowledge you stored internally is as vast as large rivers and lakes, and the glory you radiated externally is as brilliant as the sun and the moon. Your crystal and serene expressions are like howling wind and dashing rain, your elegant and convincing arguments are like swift carts and racing horses. You can know all scholars from their articles, no matter if you know or don't know them.

Alas! In the officialdom for forty years with various positions and people, you deeply feel hardship

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<sup>①</sup> Introduction of Ronald C. Egan is excerpted from the website of Stanford University and an article of Zhang Xina published on *Lianhe Zaobao*, August 11, 2015, "Ronald C. Egan: An Sinologist Initiated by Bai Xianyong".

of life; facing frustrations and difficulties, experiencing depressions and sufferings, you have got your merits fairly recognized and never hidden. Under great pressure you never gave up but got renowned in the world; your courage and resolution, your determination and justice have never faded in your old age.

At the end of his reign, considering the imperial succession, Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty said that ministers like you could be trusted for the national stability and peace. You were calm and composed to offer decisions and strategies for thousands of stability and prosperity. After great achievements were made, you didn't hesitate to retire, but your every action showed your lofty personality. Anima will never die with dust, but grow forever next to towering mountains and rushing rivers.

All common people cry and sob for you; all court officials and former friends remember and eulogize your merits.”

In early years, Ouyang Xiu and Wang Anshi were closely associated as Ouyang Xiu had helped with the promotion of Wang Anshi. They had profound relations like a teacher and a student or friends. However, Ouyang Xiu criticized Wang Anshi for his farming reform, and refused to follow the new tax policy advocated by Wang Anshi in his jurisdiction. After deterioration of their relations, Ouyang Xiu met political persecutions from Wang Anshi. The recognition of Ouyang Xiu as the most eminent contemporary cultural leader by the friend-and-enemy poet effectively reflected the historical fact.

For studying culture of the Northern Song Dynasty, there is no doubt that Ouyang Xiu is an unavoidable master. Egan regards him as a key study subject, and has made thorough research on his innovative achievements in many fields, which hits the bull's eye of the culture in that historical period.

### **Plant Cultivation as an Aesthetic Subject – A Survey on Rise of Botanic Pedigree Culture**

In one of his articles, Professor Zhu Gang from Fudan University made the following comment on research results of Ronald C. Egan, “In a positive perspective, the four fields Egan discussed were all ‘new fields’ explored in the Song Dynasty, which should be given special attention.” Ci (lyric) is a new literary genre that didn't originate from the Song Dynasty, but scholars and officials recognized it and developed it into a literary form neck and neck with poetry in the Northern Song Dynasty. Artifact collection is a new fashion in the Northern Song Dynasty, while poetry commentary is an emerging critic carrier. As observed by Egan, flower and plant commentary led by *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang*(*Luoyang Mudan Ji*) written by Ouyang Xiu in 1030s is one of many ‘Firsts’ in Chinese cultural history created by the people in the Northern Song Dynasty, ‘The Song Period thus became the first in Chinese History to witness the production of a substantial corpus of literature devoted to flower cultivation and connoisseurship, a development that preceded by centuries any

parallel in the West.’ It is evident that Egan intends to capture new phenomena occurred in an era, and focuses his attention on these rising fields. It is not true that all Confucian thinkers radically repelled aesthetic activities, but some manners and tendencies involved in such rising fields may produce challenging or even disruptive effects on traditional concepts. For example, does writing lyrics mean the writer is a dissipated person? Is it indecent for a scholar to express his love to a singing girl? Is possessing artifacts a kind of ‘vulgar desire’? Is it not serious to discuss poems in the form of casual notes and informal essays? Can a scholar indulge himself into appreciating peonies that are so attractive and beautiful? Is the unnatural beauty of grafted flower acceptable?”

However, in the study of Ronald C. Egan on the four “new fields” initiated in the Song Dynasty, the most innovative should be his focus on the important cultural phenomenon of the birth of the first special discussion on floral plants, and the exploration of its significance to the whole Chinese cultural history, which is the most distinct feature of his study on Ouyang Xiu and scholarly culture in the Song Dynasty. From the attention to *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang*, the first floral pedigree that has established a complete knowledge system, his study extends to the comprehensive analysis of entire scholarly culture of the Song Dynasty, reflecting his unique academic perspectives and profound research insights.

As early as 2009, Ronald C. Egan noticed the unusual excavation and creative narration on flowers by Ouyang Xiu, and submitted an article on an international academic conference held in the one thousandth birth year of Ouyang Xiu - *Seduced By flowers: Ouyang Xiu’s Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang*. In the same year, he published it in *Conference Volume of Essays from the International Conference Commemorating the Thousand Year Anniversary of the Birth of Ouyang Xiu*. (Chinese Department, National Taiwan University, 2009. pp. 63-82.) In *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China*, this article was included as a core chapter.

In 2009, research on “genealogy” was rare not only in overseas sinological community, but also in Chinese academic circles. Genealogical works were scattered in some academic journals as study achievements, but most of them were studies of natural science, and some were bibliographical studies as degree papers. To this disappointing research condition, Ronald C. Egan knew very well. In Chapter 3 “The Peony’s Allure: Botanical Treatises and Floral Beauty” of *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China*, he wrote, “Unlike the vast corpus of *bencao* or pharmaceutical literature that is their distant cousin, these Song-period treatises on flowering plants have received little scholarly attention. Their place in the history of Chinese botanical knowledge has been discussed with great erudition by Joseph Needham (1900-1995) and others in *Science and Civilisation in China* (vol. 6. *Biology and Biological Technology, Part I: Botany*). But their significance in the history of aesthetics and Song Dynasty thinking about beauty and connoisseurship has not been given attention it deserves.” Egan was one of the pioneering scholars who thoroughly explored cultural venation and ideology in “genealogy” works. His attention paid to floral horticulture as an aesthetic phenomenon of the Song Dynasty reflected the unusual

foresightedness and originality of his research.

Egan believed that, “Among the many ‘firsts’ in Chinese cultural history during the Northern Song period is the appearance of treatises on flowering plants. Botanical writings on the cultivation of plants, that is, treatises on aesthetics of plant cultivation, rather than on their nutritive value or pharmaceutical use, are rare before the Northern Song...The situation changed dramatically during the Northern and Southern Song periods, when we find a steady and prolific production of manuals, catalogues, and treatises on flowering plants of many kinds. This stream of texts begins with Ouyang Xiu’s *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang* (at least, this is the first of the works that survives), written in the 1030s. Soon thereafter other writers followed the precedent Ouyang had set, producing treatises on the herbaceous peonies of Yangzhou, the chrysanthemum, plum, crab-apple, rose, camellia, rhododendron, lotus, and orchid. Some plants received multiple and competing treatment. The Song Period thus became the first in Chinese History to witness the production of a substantial corpus of Literature devoted to flower cultivation and connoisseurship, a development that preceded by centuries any parallel in the West.”

These floral pedigrees are *Yangzhou Peony Pedigree*(*Yangzhou Shaoyao Pu*) by Wang Guan(1035-1100), *Fancun Chrysanthemum Pedigree*(*Fancun Ju Pu*) and *Fancun Plum Pedigree*(*Fancun Mei Pu*) by Fan Chengda(1126-1193), *Lichee Pedigree*(*Lizhi Pu*) by Cai Xiang(1012-1067), *Chrysanthemum Pedigree*(*Ju Pu*) by Shi Zhengzhi(1119-1179), *Jinzhong Orchid Pedigree*(*Jin Zhang Lan Pu*) by Zhao Shigeng(? a scholar lived in the Southern Song Dynasty), *Wang’s Orchid Pedigree*(*Wangshi Lan Pu*) by Wang Guixue(? a scholar lived in the Southern Song Dynasty), and *Begonia Pedigree*(*Haitang Pu*) by Chen Si(1225-1264). Numerous pedigrees registering objects emerged, and were all classified under the category of “pedigree”, which is a creation of the Song culture. Its beginning and formation has close ties with the aesthetic awareness, popularity and refinement of Chinese scholars. When Ji Yun(1724-1805) of the Qing Dynasty(1636-1912) compiled *Si Ku Quan Shu* (*Imperial Book Collection of Four Series* or *Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature*), he listed “Pedigree” into philosophy as a major category, and became a very special part of it.

These works “originated after the Six Dynasties when authors freely created new forms and styles so that ancient items were too overstuffed and strained to be a rational system”. In “Object Category” of “Pedigree” in *Si Ku Quan Shu*, there are such examples: “*Knife and Sword Pedigree*(*Dao Jian Lu*) and *General Study of Literature*(*Wenxian Tongkao*) by Tao Hongjing(456-536) were respectively classified into ‘Classified Books’ and ‘Miscellaneous Skills’. *Tripod Pedigree*(*Ding Lu*) by Yu Li(502-561) was also collected into ‘Miscellaneous Skills’. The knives and swords compiled by Hongjing were all about ancient stories, but not on fencing skills or casting methods. Therefore, it can be classified into ‘Classified Books’, but would be ridiculous if it is collected into ‘Miscellaneous Skills’. As there was no proper affiliation, I was upset when compiling them. I hesitated to place them into a specific category and finally classified into both. Therefore, Pedigree was a necessary new category.” In this sense, it was clear that before the Song Dynasty, physical skills and cultural subjects

were not carefully and distinctly classified. “Most books after the Song Dynasty were beyond ancient categories”, so existing catalogs were challenged.

In her works, Xiong Haiying(1972- ) concluded that, “In contrast with roaming life and landscape love of the people in the Tang Dynasty, music, chess, books, paintings, tea, wine, flowers and poetry were essential leisure elements for the scholars in the Song Dynasty. They indulged themselves into cultural interest, and pursued cultural hobbies among books and paintings, and spiritual entertainment among leisure and refined activities. ‘Cultural interests’ are hobbies for spiritual and cultural creation, appreciation and study focusing on cultural activities such as reading books and writing articles.” It was the cultural hobbies for tasteful life driven by the upper class in the Song Dynasty that closely tied “pedigree” with aesthetic appreciation of scholars. Flower appreciation, stone fondling and tea contest were all very popular in the Song Dynasty. In the Southern Song Dynasty, as one of the “Four Great Scholars of the Southern Song”, You Mao(1127-1194) sensitively noticed this new trend. Therefore, this famous bibliophile created a category of “pedigree” in his work “Bibliography of Suichu Hall” to “place all these books into a new category”. *The General Foreword of Pedigree, General Contents of Si Ku Quan Shu* believed that the proposal and creation of “pedigree” was “a sensible change for flexible solutions”. The superficial change of bibliography implied a meaningful transition of daily aesthetic culture in the Song Dynasty. The emergence of “pedigree” is a natural result from cultural evolution and academic classification. With historical and cultural evolution, books should be further classified, which was not a pure bibliographical demand.

Due to their numerous types, *Si Ku Quan Shu* collected “pedigree” books by categories rather than chronological orders. However, books collected in “pedigree” were all compiled after the Six Dynasties, especially in the Song Dynasty. The sharp bibliographic increase is undoubtedly a historic fact we should pay much attention to. The pedigree has 24 parts and 199 volumes for physical objects, including 1 part and 3 volumes of appendixes; 10 parts and 19 volumes for recipe; 21 parts and 145 volumes for grass, wood, bird, insect and fish. The reserved contents have 31 parts and 219 volumes for physical objects; 23 parts and 60 volumes for recipe (one part has no volume number); 35 parts and 202 volumes for grass, wood, bird, insect and fish. In the overall 145 parts and 848 volumes, 6 parts and 8 volumes were assigned to the period from pre-Qin Period to the Tang Dynasty, while the pedigree in the Song Dynasty increased sharply to 48 parts and 260 volumes, greatly expanding the space of pedigree. The Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties continued to improve “pedigree”, especially in Kangxi and Qianlong reigns when the two emperors approved general bibliographies for specific subjects, so the genealogy became significantly impressive.

Among the 48 parts of genealogies compiled in the Song Dynasty, the achievement and status of floral genealogy is the most eye-catching, distinguished, and influential. *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang (Luoyang Mudan Ji)* by Ouyang Xiu is a splendid pioneer as it facilitated the great prosperity of genealogy and the “denomination” for this genealogy in the Southern Song Dynasty.

In the genealogical history, the Song and Qing dynasties are most crucial. Genealogies from the Song

Dynasty have the highest quality, and the authors are the most famous. Most authors are scholar-officials who had elegant tastes and were esteemed for hundreds of years such as Ouyang Xiu(1007-1072), Lu You(1125-1210), Fan Chengda(1126-1193), Mi Fu(1051-1107) and Su Yijian(958-997). Furthermore, there was a genealogy compiled under the imperial decree, *Ancient Jade Genealogy*(*Gu Yu Tu Pu*) by Long Dayuan(?-1168). The most celebrated genealogy work in the Qing Dynasty was *Expanded Floral Genealogy by Peiwen Studio Approved by His Majesty*(*Yu Ding Peiwenzhai Guang Qun Fang Pu*), which was compiled under the imperial decree from Emperor Kangxi and referred to title of *Floral Genealogy*(*Qun Fang Pu*) by Wang Xiangjin(1561-1653) in the Ming Dynasty. This is indispensable to the attention and care initiated by Ouyang Xiu for plant and floral literary themes.

Ouyang Xiu's work focused on the popular cultural hotspot - tree peony, and created this special writing style. It became a complete knowledge system and was widely recognized at that time. Many genealogies subsequently emerged in the Song Dynasty as a result of his work, and it was highly praised by scholars in the Song Dynasty. Among most genealogical works in the Song Dynasty, authors mentioned Ouyang Xiu and his work in their forewords or postscripts. At the beginning of *Yangzhou Peony Genealogy*, Wang Guan briefly stated, "Details of flower growing are well recorded in Ouyang's work, so I will not elaborate on them". Other genealogical works also mentioned this book in various ways, and a public opinion formed that Ouyang Xiu and Lu Yu(733?-804?) were authorities respectively on tree peony and tea. Du Wan(? a scholar lived in the Northern Song Dynasty) concluded in the postscript of his *Yunlin Stone Genealogy*(*Yun Lin Shi Pu*), "I used to say that tea genealogy by Lu Yu, wine genealogy by Du Kang, bamboo genealogy by Dai Kai, four study treasure genealogy by Su Taigu, tree peony genealogy by Ouyang Xiu and lichee genealogy by Cai Xiang were all classic works, but there wasn't an authoritative book for stone, which is really pitiful. Du Jiyang has selected outstanding types and ranked relevant products. He listed their places of origin, distinguished mild and dry, beautiful and mediocre products in his work so his genealogy can be publicized." The contents of *Tianpeng Tree Peony Genealogy* by Lu You is completely the same as those of *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang* (*Luoyang Mudan Ji*) by Ouyang Xiu, and the latter's compilation styles were also inherited.

Egan believes that, as to *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang* (*Luoyang Mudan Ji*), "The sort of writing is exceptional in Ouyang's Literary collection. It would be difficult to find elsewhere in his works a passage filled with such detail about the physical world, whatever the subject may be. The attention to technical procedures, in this case horticultural ones, is also unusual. There is normally a tendency to avoid display of such specialized 'hands-on' knowledge as something inappropriate for a gentleman. The only knowledge a person of Ouyang's station in life is apt to want to show is that gained in connection with his classical education, that is, intellectual knowledge and book knowledge. The learning displayed in this passage, however, is that of the gardener, a figure who otherwise had no place in Ouyang's world." *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang* (*Luoyang Mudan Ji*) is not only a book focusing on gardening techniques, but also an important work exhibiting aesthetic thoughts of Ouyang Xiu. It has adopted a special form, and is an "encyclopedia" on Luoyang tree peonies.

“Ouyang Xiu’s treatise, then, is an attempt to convey information about the city’s extraordinary blossoms, written by someone who has lived there and experienced them first-hand.” At that time, only peony was called “Hua” (blossom) to emphasize its supreme status. In *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang (Luoyang Mudan Ji)*, Ouyang Xiu said, “Almost all people in Luoyang love flowers. In spring, citizens, noble or humble, including pole carriers, arrange flowers. When blossoms come, scholars and populace meet their friends to appreciate. Markets arise around ancient temples or deserted houses with terraces and ponds. Booths are set up, and music and songs are heard here and there... It won’t end until the blossom season closes.” “Almost all households have blossoms.” In “Book of Flowers”(Ha Jing), Zhang Yi listed tree peony “the first rank with nine grades” in accordance with the principle of “descending order of nine ranks and nine grades”. The *Expanded Floral Genealogy(Guang Qun Fang Pu)* notes, “In the middle of Kaiyuan Reign of the Tang Dynasty, the country was peaceful and prosperous, and tree peony thrived in Chang’an. In the Song Dynasty, tree peony in Luoyang is the most famous nationwide. Famous scholars such as Shao Kangjie, Fan Yaofu, Sima Guang, Ouyang Xiu eulogized it in their poems. Populace in Luoyang loved blossoms, which can be confirmed in *Accounts of Luoyang Customs(Luoyang Fengtu Ji)*”. It is evident for the supreme status of peony as it was highly recognized by senior officials and famous scholars. *Floral Genealogy* records, “During the Tang Dynasty and the Song Dynasty, tree peony in Luoyang is the most famous nationwide, so it was also called Luoyang Blossom.” Tree peony was highly esteemed starting from the Tang Dynasty and lasting to the Northern Song Dynasty, so its reputation “the finest peony under heaven is in Luoyang” was universally recognized. As a cultural hotspot, it is very natural for Ouyang Xiu to regard it as a study subject. However, by analyzing previous history and scholarly culture, Egan has discovered that Ouyang Xiu faced big challenges.

In Chapter Three *The Peony’s Allure: Botanical Treatises and Floral Beauty, The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China*, he wrote, “The goal of this chapter is to examine the ways that Ouyang and the later authors he inspired accomplished what was difficult for them to do. We will see in the pages of their works clear evidence of both their eagerness to transmit knowledge about the cultivation of botanical beauty and their ambivalence at every step concerning what they were doing. The surprising thing is that their treatises got written at all, given all the reasons there were not to write them. Here, we will examine issues that lie at the core of the authors’ struggle to overcome those disincentives, the issues they grappled with, the ingenious justifications they hit upon, and unsolvable problems they sometimes shied away from. The intellectual boldness they generally show in turning their hands to his undertaking, which finally they accomplished, exemplifies the innovative spirit of Song literati culture. We have only to remind ourselves how many more centuries it took for a comparable body of writings on botanical beauty to appear elsewhere in the world to begin to appreciate the significance of this Song-period accomplishment.”

This comment is rather pertinent. It is well known that, in the Tang Dynasty, under descriptions of Bai Juyi(772-846) and others, tree peony was given immense negative comment. Egan has clear



knowledge about this, and has delved into the research and description dilemma of peony. Then, where on earth is the obstacle that must be surmounted and overcome: “All plants are not equal in Song Dynasty thought. It was much easier to write about the aesthetics enjoyment of certain plants than others, given the weight of Confucian(and Buddhist) injunctions concerning sensuous enjoyments. Before Ouyang Xiu, the Buddhist monk Zanning(919-1001) had written a catalogue on bamboo. This is a relatively easy thing to do because of the well-developed associations between that plant and the ideal traits of the cultured gentleman (whether scholar-official, literatus, or monk). And it was something that had been done before. By the same token, it would not have posed much of a problem to write a treatise on the cultivation of the chrysanthemum or plum, for the same reasons. All three plants had long since been transformed into botanical embodiments of admirable human traits, so that appreciation of them was considered indicative of commendable values and, thus, nothing to be ashamed of. Not so with the peony. The plant’s lush and enormous blossoms are both visually showy and aromatically alluring. What human associations it had were of the feminine, and the sensually and seductively feminine at that. If it was a culturally unexceptional event for Zanning to write about bamboo, it was, I would argue, a remarkable event for Ouyang Xiu, as a junior official just embarking on his career in 1034 - at a stage we would expect him to be apprehensive about making the wrong impression - to produce a detailed account of peony cultivation. His example is repeatedly invoked in later botanical treatises, so we can be sure that his account was known by and influential upon his contemporaries.”

Egan has insightfully captured the exact difficulty in writing. Literary and cultural aggregation of previous dynasties has endowed some plants with high moral connotations and natural sanctity for scholars in the Song Dynasty to compile genealogies. In this sense, peony is apparently an exception. If one wanted to compile a genealogy for it, its innate deficiency as a moral symbol would be an unavoidable issue. Therefore, Egan further directs his eyes on how Ouyang Xiu handled this issue and justified his theory in his work: “The widespread enthusiasm for the beauty of the peony blossom was often decried by members of the scholarly class as childish or crazed. Unlike the plum or the chrysanthemum, the peony enjoyed no interpretive tradition that recast it as something easily accommodated by gentlemanly ideals. Ouyang could hardly have created such a new conception and image of the plant single-handedly. Yet he is clearly eager to convey his considerable knowledge of the plant and its cultivation. That is the crux of his dilemma. His solution is to acknowledge openly and early in his treatise the intrinsic cosmological defectiveness of his subject, though the implications of what he says go beyond cosmology. To say that the ‘innate life-breath’ of a thing is imbalanced and defective is to imply that in some absolute sense the thing is less than ‘good.’ It is, Ouyang explicitly tells us later, an unnatural and baleful thing but not, oddly enough, a harmful thing. Having said that much, Ouyang evidently feels that he has paid the price his subject requires and gets on with the matter of telling us how to cultivate it. The passage discussed here cannot, I suggest, be properly accounted for without reference to something extrinsic to it, that is, prevailing attitudes of the lettered elite toward the peony and, especially, peony mania. As the author of the first detailed written account

of the plant, Ouyang cannot simply pretend that biases against enthusiasm for its flowers do not exist. Thus he takes account of them in his own peculiar way.”

Striking problem-solving awareness and gradual decomposing approach of problems is the argumentation pattern of Egan probing into Ouyang Xiu’s *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang*. Profound knowledge and thorough understanding of the overall culture in the Song Dynasty facilitates his perfect operation, and his insights and subordinate arguments are penetrating and invaluable.

### **Self-contradictory argumentation in genealogies- Exploration of traditional cultural restrictions**

Another feature of Egan’s study is his contemplation in the theoretical dimension. During research into the content of *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang*, Egan also probes deeply into aesthetic concepts and ideological tendencies in Ouyang Xiu’s argumentation, and compares them with genealogies by other authors. Therefore, the feature is well demonstrated that plant genealogies in the Song Dynasty stressed expression of aesthetic concepts and ideological tendencies in addition to introduction of scientific knowledge.

“Ouyang goes to great length to discredit received wisdom about why Luoyang would be blessed with extraordinarily attractive flowers, and substitutes his own explanation, which is an odd one. He equates beauty with imbalance and defectiveness of the essential life-breath of the substance. This is a most unorthodox theory of beauty. The conventional idea of beauty is that it results from unusually well-balanced, harmonized, and high quality life-breath, rather than from a flawed allotment of the same. It is true that sometimes the concept of *pian* ‘imbalance’ in life-breath is used to account for differences in living things. But that is in a neutral sense of ‘imbalance,’ not where it is likened to defectiveness. And ‘defective life-breath’ is ordinarily associated with things that go awry in nature. Thus, when a star falls or a river dries up it is said to have had ‘defective life-breath.’ The ordinary understanding of the relationship between life-force and physical health or beauty is that the latter is a consequence of a superior endowment of the former...Having asserted the connection between inferior life-breath and beauty, Ouyang then tries to recoup something favorable to say about his flowers with the distinction he draws between the ‘calamitous’ and ‘anomalies.’ The argument essentially is that, although the flowers are abnormal and flawed, they are harmless freaks. It is interesting to see that Ouyang must introduce some distortion into his account of the crucial term, *yao*. His insistence that *yao* is not associated with harmful influences diverges from the way the word is used normally. Historical writings abound with examples of monsters and baleful emanations called *yao* that did indeed harm people or portend disasters. The term has the related sense of ‘alluring, bewitching, seductive,’ often applied to feminine beauty, that is clearly relevant to Ouyang’s selection of it. But even in that sense, the common understanding is that female seductresses of the *yao* quality are highly dangerous. Ouyang’s reasoning, then, is strained. He seems to want to have it both ways, that the blossoms are aberrant but innocuous. The trouble is that the words and concepts available to

him tend to preclude that possibility.”As Xiong Haiying observes, the reason hidden between lines and revealed by this discovery is, “in poetry environment and cultural activities, scholars in the Northern Song Dynasty developed common aesthetic psychology and taste, which further evolved into contemporary aesthetic tendencies. These tendencies determined writing environments of authors and affected their selections of themes, forms and styles. On one hand, these tendencies offered opportunities to authors, on the other hand, restricted their creation scopes.”

In order to justify his narration on peony, Ouyang Xiu deliberately distorted the meaning of “yao” and rectified traditional perceptions on tree peony. Egan has accurately captured this subtle hidden intention and further made insightful elaborations. From Egan’s argumentation, we also notice that Ouyang Xiu made a special demonstration in compiling *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang* in order to avert harmful comments on tree peony as a negative-value-bearing symbol and promote its positive values. Egan hits the nail on the head in analyzing the argumentation strategies Ouyang Xiu used for specific manipulations.

Another major feature of Egan’s study on floral genealogy is his reference to and analysis of generality among difference and difference among generality in floral genealogies. This is an evidence of the depth of his research theory. He has acutely discovered that severe conflicts between natural and artificial creations are common in floral genealogies. He also found that these conflicts transformed into a one-or-the-other cultural selection for authors, which further led to objective deviations in their descriptions of subject matter. This exact deviation represents the internal contradictory ideas and dilemmas between traditional and factual selections. The deviation also reflects the exploratory dilemma when authors wrote with this new literary style - how to harmonize objective gardening technique achievements and subjective traditional cultural psychologies. The contradictory examples and distorted argument interpretations by authors further reflected the fact that botanical genealogy works were not genuine botanical works, but botanical aesthetic works full of cultural interest as the concepts they conveyed were inconsistent with the facts exhibited by objective scientific data.

As to positive effects of natural creations and artificial efforts on botanical quality, genealogical authors expressed different opinions, from which Egan has discovered contradiction and confrontation between traditions and facts. By listing some authors who intentionally evaded or even lied about the fact that grafted flowers are more beautiful than natural species, Egan tells us that floral genealogies in the Song Dynasty are not pure records on botanic horticulture knowledge and flower appreciation customs, but texts governed by some aesthetic and ideological concepts. In order to manifest and convey the concepts they advocated, sometimes the authors may sacrifice the truth of their descriptions.

To demonstrate the generality among difference and difference among generality on the question which of natural creation and artificial effort contributes more positively to botanic quality, Egan takes Wang Guan and Liu Ban(1023-1089) as examples and compares them for argumentation. The

reason why he hasn't listed other authors is that these two authors compiled peony genealogies and had similar opinions. This shows his carefulness and precision in example selection: "The beauty of the peony was not the only problem for those who wanted to write about it. Another was the way that beauty was achieved, through horticultural intervention in the natural process of growth and flowering....As Ouyang Xiu observes, 'Unless the plant is grafted, the blossoms will not be exceptional.' But this poses a difficult issue for the gentleman connoisseur, who likes to think that his enjoyment of the beauty of the blossoms is the appreciation of what is 'natural' (*ziran*), the superiority of which over anything accomplished through human agency is normally taken for granted. The problem is not taken up in Ouyang's treatise, but it is in a treatise of 1075 by Wang Guan on the herbaceous peony (*shaoyao*) of Yangzhou." This is *Yangzhou Peony Genealogy* written by Wang Guo. After citing part of the original text, Egan analyzes, "Obviously, Wang Guan does not have a solution to the problem he raises. He puts his finger on the contradiction of the natural order of things without being about to explain it away." "Wang is uncomfortable with the 'unnaturalness' of horticulture techniques, and so he feels compelled to contradict directly those who assert that the flowers of the present surpass those of the past. He is willing to go so far as to acknowledge the ubiquitousness of such 'artificial' practices as grafting, but he stops short of saying that they have actually resulted in superior blossoms....In any case, Wang is so distressed over the thought that human intervention has actually enhanced the beauty of the flower...And Wang does this even though he himself, wishing to provide a thorough and responsible account of the peony varieties, adds several to the traditional list, but only after going out of his way to tell us that the new ones are 'inferior.'"

"But at least Wang Guan acknowledges this awkward exception to verities about the hierarchy of the cosmos. Other authors were not necessarily so forthright. The poetry critic Liu Ban also wrote a treatise on the herbaceous peonies of Yangzhou, and did so just two years before Wang Guan wrote his....Unlike Wang Guan, however, he chooses not to identify this as a problem and instead denies that it happens....His words leave no doubt about which method of cultivation is preferable: '[The Luoyang peonies] are grown by grafting, carried out through human effort, and so every year they are different and constantly new. The [Yangzhou] herbaceous peonies, on the other hand, are grown from seed. They alone get their appearance naturally.' Annual novelty does not compare, in Liu Ban's mind, with naturalness. So eager is he to attribute the latter quality to the blossoms he has chosen to write about that he evidently overlooks part of the truth about how the best ones were produced (as we know from Wang Guan) "Earlier mention was made of Liu Ban's insistence in the preface to his catalogue of Yangzhou peonies that they do not require grafting."

Taking Wang Guan and Liu Ban as examples, Egan proved that some genealogies intentionally evaded or denied the fact that artificial elements contributed more to floral cultivation than natural creation. This became the opinion of one party, and he has also pointed out the opinion of the contrary party: "The other type of author, exemplified by Ouyang Xiu and Kong Wuzhong, is not bothered by the artificiality of the horticultural methods and focuses instead with great enthusiasm upon their results. This type of author, accepting as he does the human innovations of his day, asserts with

confidence that the ancients never knew such blossoms as he now describes. There is a great pride in the achievements of the day that seems to underlie this second outlook.”

Comparing the two opinions, Egan found that they were both partial. However, he also discussed the degrading effect of this deviation on flower growers, and lasting restraint on the party who believed that artificial elements contributed more positively to flower cultivation than natural elements. “Yet this second frame of mind was evidently not easy to sustain. Doubts about the propriety of human ‘interference’ with nature’s ways were liable to return, undermining the excitement over magnificent displays of floral beauty. The depth of ambivalence over the unnaturalness of peony cultivation made unqualified pride in the horticulturalists’ achievements quite rare, even among the plant’s greatest enthusiasts.”

It is unavoidable for authors to cherish conflicting concepts, but Egan has thoroughly explored it with subtle research perspectives, and finally found these contradictory opinions held by the same author. He compared *Account of the Tree Peonies of Luoyang (Luoyang Mudan Ji)* by Ouyang Xiu and a long poem *Luoyang Tree Peony Painting(Luoyang Mudan Tu)* he wrote 11 years later, and discovered, “This is the same author who, in his peony treatise, gave detailed instructions about the techniques of grafting and cutting seedlings, all without a hint of ambivalence. He wanted his readers to be well informed about the latest horticultural techniques. But now the language Ouyang uses in his poem consistently indicates discomfort over just such human intervention. The persons who cultivate the new blossoms are said to be ‘ever more ingenious and fabricating,’ they ‘compete for novelty and gorgeousness,’ and the result of their efforts is characterized as ‘superficial allure.’ No one would mistake these for neutral terms; they are clearly pejorative.”

For this drastic change, Egan tried to make a reasonable explanation in terms of psychology and literary genre: “We might cite various considerations to account for Ouyang’s apparent change of heart. The new types of peony flowers make him keenly aware of his own mortality (the flowers are getting more beautiful, while he is physically deteriorating), and that is why he becomes nostalgic and views the new blossoms with cool disdain. Or the change may be a consequence of the two different genres of writing. When composing the peony treatise, an unorthodox thing to do, Ouyang was relatively unaffected by the conventional preference of ‘the natural’ over ‘the man-made,’ but when he wrote in a more formal and traditional form (i.e., the poem), the conventional attitude returned and dominated.” Both suppositions seem reasonable, and Egan has manifested his outstanding research capabilities for viewing subjects from multiple perspectives.

The issue that Egan noticed is a critical topic in Chinese culture and spirit. He was very sure of the significant influence of this topic on scholars in the Song Dynasty or even the whole Chinese ancient history. Therefore, he drew the following conclusion: “Given the supremacy of heaven and earth in Chinese assumptions about cosmology and man’s place in nature, it ought not to happen that human effort is capable of ‘usurping’ powers that rightfully belong to higher entities. But there it is, indisputable in the manifestation of the most attractive peony blossoms. Without human effort applied

to them, the plants produce inferior flowers.” “Acceptance of the human artifice involved was a difficult attitude to sustain. The tradition of valuing natural processes far above any that man might bring to bear was hard to ignore, and it had a way of reasserting itself even in the minds of those who managed to set it aside for a time. The contention between valuation of nature and pride in human ingenuity was ongoing.” He used this to explain the self-contradiction in Ouyang Xiu, and the complex cultural psychology behind the reason why floral genealogy authors were obscure about or intentionally evaded the question that which of natural creation and artificial effort contributed more positively to floral quality. This explanation has sufficiently proved that Egan knew Chinese cultural traditions very well.

In Chinese ancient history, there were such cultural traditions as “contrivances of wonderful device and extraordinary cunning” and “ritual prohibition”. “Diabolic tricks and wicked craft” first appeared in Second Half of Taishi, *The She King • The Book of Chow • The Great Declaration 3 (Shangshu • Zhou Shu • Taishixia)*: “(King of the Shang Dynasty) He makes contrivances of wonderful device and extraordinary cunning, to please his woman.” Kong Yingda(574-648) noted, “contrivances of wonderful device are extraordinary skills, and extraordinary cunning are excessive pursuit of exquisiteness. The two are roughly the same. But contrivances works with human, and cunning works with rarity”. *The She King* is the earliest Chinese historical book available now, the main content of which are decrees issued by kings for appointing officials or rewarding vassals. Therefore, contrivances of wonderful device and extraordinary cunning were originally announced in the form of decrees. “Ritual prohibition” originates from, *Book of Jin • Chronicle of Emperor Wudi*: “In the fourth year of Xianning (ad.278)...On the Xinsi day of November, imperial doctor Sima Chengju presented a fur coat made of pheasant head feather. The emperor destroyed it in front of the hall for the reason that diabolic tricks and wicked crafts were prohibited by rites. On the date of Jiashen, the emperor issued an edict to punish anyone who would violate the decree.” It is obvious that imperial decrees also concern ritual prohibition. These decrees evolved into cultural traditions to rectify moral deeds that have been deeply rooted in Chinese cultural psychology.

In a speech, Mr. Qian Mu(1895-1990) said, “A culture must have traditions, otherwise there is no culture....Culture is an ‘existence’ which must have its ‘timeliness’. Any matter can’t exist for some time and suddenly vanish. The existing time is the tradition of the existence.” “Therefore, when we talk about culture, we must aware that there are traditions, and it would be impossible to discuss culture without considering traditions. Traditions must have their ‘duration’. It is just like you hold one thing in your hand. If it hasn't dropped, it is in your hand. Traditions are holding and evolution.” “Cultural tradition is a life book of a nation...The life of a nation has long historical aggregation and evolves into cultural traditions.” “Any life must have a firm desire for sustainability. This desire is invisible, but can be deduced....Culture has its tradition, life and individuality. It seems that it has a seed attached with an internal spirit.”

The concept to refuse technology was also a cultural tradition, and existed in Chinese mode of

thinking for thousands of years. Mr. Nan Huaijin(1918-2012) said, “In fact, if we reconsider our academic thought history of technology development, it is not true there weren’t insightful figures, but they all feared the terrible fame of ‘contrivances of wonderful device and extraordinary cunning’ and ‘ritual prohibition’ that were disapproved by traditional concepts. In short, it is also a fact that technological development has always been strangled by the concept of ‘contrivances of wonderful device and extraordinary cunning’ and ‘ritual prohibition’ in our history since the Warring State Period.”

Why were contrivances of wonderful device and extraordinary cunning strangled by “ritual prohibition”? The theory of Zhuangzi can give us the answer. In *Zhuangzi •The Heaven and the Earth*, a gardener replied Zigong(520.BC-456.BC): “I’ve learned from my teacher that a man who employs an ingenious machine must do ingenious deeds and that a man who does ingenious deeds must have an ingenious mind. A man with an ingenious mind will not be pure and simple; a man without a pure and simple mind will have an unrestful spirit; a man with an unrestful spirit will not attain Tao. I do not use a well-sweep not because I don’t know that it works well, but because I feel it a shame to use it.” Therefore, Zigong commented the gardener: “He has forgotten about success and profit, he has forgotten about tricks and schemes.” The discourses implied that technology would bring people upset and perplexity, which gradually became an uncontrollable force and led people astray. The most important is that technology would defile souls and made people deviate from moral ways. Therefore, Zhuangzi proposed that technology should be abandoned and nature should be respected to safeguard purity of hearts.

What Egan noticed were not only “contrivances of wonderful device and extraordinary cunning”and “ritual prohibition”, but also the huge historical, cultural and psychological background - the Chinese reverence for nature and regarding nature as the supreme cultural tradition.

In Chinese culture, reverence for nature has a very long history. In antiquity, imperial rites included offering sacrifices to the heaven, earth and deities. Offering sacrifices to the heaven on an altar originated from the Five Emperor period, and was observed by emperors dynasty after dynasty wishing great harvest and peaceful governance. Even for ancient imperial edicts, the expression “it’s under the heaven’s will and from the emperor’s ordinance that ...” would be always placed at the beginning of the text. “Heaven” in the second vertical line is always placed at the highest point of the entire edict, and “under” in the first vertical line is always placed below the “Heaven”, and other words, of course, should also be placed below the “Heaven”. In *Chapter Heaven and Earth* by Zhuangzi, he believed that, as the ancestors of all matters, heaven and earth were products of original vitality. The Sixty-Four Divining Diagrams in *The Book of Changes(Yi Jing)* also start with Qian (sky) and Kun (earth). It is clear that the supreme statuses of heaven and earth have a very long history, and this belief was deeply rooted in the Chinese culture and psychology.

What Egan explored most was the exact origin of cultural and psychological traditions behind “contrivances of wonderful device and extraordinary cunning”and “ritual prohibition”that made

genealogy authors intentionally deny the effects of artificial elements. In the discussion of Egan, heaven and earth corresponded to natural creation in genealogy works, while artificial efforts corresponded to “contrivances of wonderful device and extraordinary cunning” in *The She King* and “dexterity” described by Zhuangzi. Under the control of such cultural traditions, genealogy authors refused to praise or intentionally deny the huge effects of artificial elements on floral horticulture, the reason of which can be summarized by Zhuangzi’s statement, “I do not use a well-sweep not because I don’t know that it works well, but because I feel it a shame to use it.” Egan started his genealogy study in the dimension of theory by carefully reading texts and gradually examine cultural mentality behind the argumentation mode of Ouyang Xiu. He also sufficiently considered the immense restriction of cultural traditions on botanical genealogy authors, and the phenomena of consequent deviations of their conclusions. These not only reflected his profound knowledge, but also sufficiently manifested his complete knowledge system, insightful and unique theoretical thinking.

## CONCLUSION

As an international sinological authority on the culture in the Song Dynasty, Egan is highly recognized in the global sinology community for his solid and profound Chinese cultural knowledge, meticulous and incisive research strategies, mature and sharp academic perspectives, unique and advanced analytical approaches. In summary, his academic research has the following three major characteristics:

First, in research horizons, Egan has engaged himself in ideological history, political history, literary history, and scientific history, whose knowledge has covered most aspects of elite and popular culture in the Song Dynasty. In interdisciplinary assimilation, Egan can sharply find academic growth points and interpretation spaces. He can make systematic exploration with broad research views and integrating multiple disciplines under the grand background of Chinese culture. He stresses extensive interdisciplinary relations and break through scope limits for all-around and cubic perspectives to the research objects. His description is mellow and enlightened, concise and clear.

Second, Egan has outstanding academic knowledge and memory for most effective citations. He can easily and effortlessly use the most pertinent cases for illustration. His writing style is like what Liu Xie said in *Wen -Hsin Tiao-Lung (Carving a Dragon at the Core of Literature)*, “thought may reach a thousand years in the past”, and “our vision may cross (t’ung\*) ten thousand leagues”. His erudition and insight of research skills were thoroughly reflected in his capability for global mastery of his articles. Even isolated words and phrases of missing works hidden in other works were accurately captured by him from tremendous literature, and became valuable background knowledge or significant evidence. Some citations are from works that have been rarely mentioned before. His citations of historical and literary materials were perfectly inserted into his discourses, which have effectively promoted his argumentation, confirmed his viewpoints, and made every of his conclusion natural and convincing.



Third, in scholarly research, Egan has adopted the cultural assimilation outlook advocated by Mr. Qian Zhongshu, i.e. breaking through limitations of humanities, as well as brilliant academic methods recommended by Fang Zhitong (1910-1995), Yan Yiyun (1912-1991) and Hong Ye (1893-1980). Therefore, he could draw on essential resources of Chinese academic traditions, and fantastically used them in his argumentation. With reference to and improvement of Chinese excellent academic methods, incisive historical analysis, detail-focusing literary explorations, exquisite and remarkable understanding and integration of the previous three methods, Egan has achieved his fastidious and superiors academic methods, and has promoted his insightful power of academic research to the summit of the international sinological community. Therefore, he has published a number of books that have been highly recognized.

To sum up, as a leading figure in the international contemporary sinological community on the literary research in the Song Dynasty, Egan has successfully demonstrated his wave-riding authoritative status with a series of reliable and noteworthy works. With sharp views and profound knowledge, he has made informative and enlightening discourses on various merits of the Song Dynasty where Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975) dreamed to live for its prosperity and magnificence.

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