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The Realization of Poetic Composition and Literary Conception: How the Creation and Development of Ye Xiaoluan Imagery Contributes to the Literature History

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Abstract Being a real historic personage, Ye Xiaoluan 叶小鸾, a talented lady in late Ming dynasty, not only triggered a literary family’s calamity, but also became into a public topic of discussion by widely circulating Wumengtang ji 午梦堂集 (Collection of Noon Dream hall). She was clever and quick on the uptake, and excessively sentimental. Being romanced by her family, especially by Ye Shaoyuan 叶绍袁, her profile opened up a new outlook of literary conception, while her immortal sense and supernatural power, played up by Jin Shengtan’s 金圣叹 planchette writing, was endowed with romantic charm and rebelling appeal. Since being into Qing dynasty, Ye Xiaoluan had became the element for various literary works, but most of the works could simply simulate fairy tales or copy planchette words, except Honglou meng 红楼梦 (Dream of the red chamber) could deeply expand this imagery’s literary grace and core value in light of cultural interest and aesthetics aspect. The development of Ye Xiaoluan’s imagery and its success on aesthetics clearly indicated a literary element’s roadmap and structural feature, also disclosed that writer’s personality, liking, even the ethics level, could make significant effect on the literary conception and compositional structure.

Keywords Ye Xiaoluan, Jin Shengtan, poetic composition, literary conception, literature history

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**Introduction**

In the literary history of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the stories of the females accounted a great deal for the literary conception. Not only the females’ considerable talents were manifested by the trends of the times, but their beauty, brilliance and outstanding ability had also created a platform of aesthetics and appreciation for the males as the discoverers, who were provided with many chances to concentrate emotion and loves. The male scholars, who were diligently to pursue with delight, undoubtedly broadened the space of literary conception, so that many truthful, or fabricated, or both truthful and fabricated female imagery, come into the multi-colorful gallery of literature history, initiating and building up new literary conception with their brilliance and correlated tale of odd behaviors. Ye Xiaoluan (CE 1616–1632), who was born in Wujiang, Suzhou city, was one among those female imageries. Her father was Ye Shaoyuan (CE 1589-1648), a jinshi 进士 (successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations) in Tianqi’s reign of Ming dynasty and ever assumed section head in the Ministry of Industry, and her mother was Shen Yixiu 沈宜修 (CE 1590-1635), a famous lady from a distinguished family in Wujiang. Ye Xiaoluan lived alone seventeen years in her boudoir, and passed away abruptly just five days before her marriage. In her Fan sheng xiang ji 返生香集 (Fan sheng xiang collection) there was about two hundred articles collected, however, being an important carrier and element of literary conception, her popularity in the literary history of the late Ming and Qing dynasties had constructed a literary scenery with special charm.

**Creation of Ye Xiaoluan Literary Imagery**

In Ye Xiaoluan’s life, a lot of particulars could draw your attention, such as her extreme beauty and young death before her marriage, her literary work and family background, as well as her literary family full of talented and beautiful ladies. Revisiting all these, however, you could discover that all those were nothing worthy to mention specially in the region of south of the Yangtze River in the Ming and Qing dynasties. At that time, abrupt deaths of clever and beautiful young ladies were not rarely observed. Wumengtang ji 记录了周挹芬 and others. The stories of ladies who died of illness several days before their marriage, such as Chen Tong 陈同, who ever commented Mudan ting 牡丹亭 (The peony pavilion), were well known for a period. The honorable positions with literary family and the families full of talented and beautiful ladies were normal things at that time, thus should not be the key to address the topic herein. However, when all those important