

Copia in The Book of Songs

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Abstract: Copia, an important rhetorical concept, refers to the copious style in both expression and subject-matter, signifying fullness, abundance, or variety. Erasmus, one of the finest scholars and a significant figure in patristics and ancient literature, addressed it systematically for the first time. From the perspective of Copia, this essay examines The Book of Songs, the earliest anthology of Chinese poetry and a major document in the Confucian tradition. Copia is aptly illustrated in The Book of Songs and is a powerful strategy to generate richness in both expression and subject-matter, which may serve as a catalyst to employ prominent Western rhetorical theories to investigate Chinese traditional classics, stimulating the implementation of Copia in people's writing.

Keywords: Copia; The Book of Songs; Abundance of expression; Abundance of subject-matter

1. Introduction

1.1 Need for the Study

Copia contributes to the fullness and richness of style and many scholars have recognized its significance. Erasmus deems that variety (Copia in the expression) is such a powerful skill in every aspect that nothing is brilliant unless it is commended by variety. "Exercising in expressing oneself in different ways will be of considerable importance in general for the acquisition of style" (Yuan, 2013, p. 106), where he underscores the value of Copia. However, the Chinese classics are rich in Copia and have always been good examples for our research on this key notion.

The Book of Songs, the earliest anthology of Chinese poetry, is considered one of the Confucian classics, including 305 poems that date from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the middle of the Spring and Autumn Period. Therefore, studying Copia in The Book of Songs can allow people to appreciate Chinese classical literature from a new perspective and gain a deeper understanding of the richness of the language, syntax, context, and other aspects of the work, as well as promote a more in-depth study of Copia.

1.2 Research Objective

This paper is intended to examine the application of the Western rhetorical concept of Copia in The Book of Songs, the earliest collection of Chinese poetry, and to reveal the rich expressive and thematic aspects of Copia as displayed in ancient classical Chinese literature. In addition, the paper also aims to provide a new perspective on the study of traditional Chinese literary classics and to guide university students to avoid the repetitiveness of expressions in their written and spoken expressions where possible with a view to making their expressions richer and more abundant.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Related Studies on Copia

Despite several references to "variety" or Copia in Cicero's *De Oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, the theoretical study of Copia was first unearthed in Erasmus' *De Copia*, which is probably the only monograph on the issue and in which he addressed a wide range of expression and subject-matter. Modern scholars also have done extensive research on Copia. Due to Copia's "essentially figurative" nature, reading and writing become less prescriptive and more suggestive (Terence, 1979, p. 11). Studies on Copia, however, are still sparse in China. How to prevent easy repetition in English writing is illustrated through Copia (Yuan, 2015).^[8]

2.2 Related Studies on The Book of Songs

The Book of Songs, the first anthology of poems in the history of Chinese literature, has been analyzed by many scholars and exerted tremendous influence in later literary writings. Adopting a rhetorical and artistic perspective, Lin (2013) ^[4]discusses six

aspects of the poem, including the rhetorical art of the fugue, to see the extent to which the rhetoric of the Book of Songs matured and influenced future generations. From the perspective of the rhetorical device of metaphor in The Book of Songs, Wu (2011) elaborates on the metaphorical image of the “peach blossom” and the aesthetic implications of metaphor within the text.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Definition of Copia

According to Erasmus, Copia refers to “the abundant style in both subject-matter and expression” (Erasmus, 1978, p. 301). Copia is a Latin word, meaning “fullness, abundance, or variety” (Enos, 2010, p. 149) ^[1] in English. Crowley and Hawhee (2004) define “Copia as an approach to reach the abundance and ready supply of language”. Thus, the term Copia is a rhetorical expression that signifies an abundance and variety of language.

3.2 Functions of Copia

Erasmus once stated, “variety is so powerful in every sphere that there is absolutely nothing, however brilliant, which is not dimmed if not commended by variety” (1978, p. 302). According to Erasmus, there are three main advantages of Copia. Firstly, “exercise in expressing oneself in different ways will be of considerable importance in general for the acquisition of style” (Yuan, 2013, p. 106). Additionally, “we shall also find it of great assistance in commenting on authors, translating books from foreign languages, and writing verse” (Yuan, 2013, p. 107).

4. Analysis of The Book of Songs from the Perspective of Copia

4.1 Description of The Book of Songs

The Book of Songs is China’s earliest collection of poems, and it marks the beginning of the country’s poetic traditions. From the early Western Zhou Dynasty to the middle of the Spring and Autumn Period, the majority of the works in The Book of Songs were produced, containing 311 poems but only 305 existed. They can all be sung with music.

4.2 Analysis Based on Metaphor

Erasmus defined metaphor as “a word is transferred away from its real and proper signification to one which lies outside its proper sphere” (Erasmus, 1978, p. 333). The rhetorical device of metaphor is used extensively in The Book of Songs to achieve expressive richness.

- (1) 南有**乔木**，不可休思。汉有游女，不可求思。
- (2) **桃**之夭夭，灼灼其华。之子于归，宜其室家。
- (3) 于嗟**鸛**兮，无食**桑葚**。于嗟女兮，无与士耽。

The extensive use of nature in The Book of Songs created these fresh and natural metaphors from the most genuine exposure and direct knowledge of the natural world. In the above poems, “trees” (乔木) and “peaches” (桃) are all used as metaphors for the wonderful image of women. And in The Book of Songs, over 150 poems, representing half of the total number, depict beautiful images of female figures in ancient times, as well as their views on marriage, love, and labor.

In verse ^[1], the poet compares the woman he adores to a tall, slender tree (乔木), which he can only watch at a distance but can never obtain, thus causing him great disappointment. In verse ^[2], a poem of bride congratulations, the poet compares the beautiful appearance of a woman to a luxuriant peach (桃), and compliments and blesses the new bride with the flowers, leaves, and fruits of the peach tree in a comprehensive way. In verse ^[3], “turtledove” (鸛) is used as a metaphor for women, while “mulberry” (桑葚) is used as a metaphor for love. It emphasizes that women are more likely to fall in love than men, to lose themselves in love, and to have a self-sacrificing spirit, but it also implies a satire on the patriarchal society of ancient China.

4.3 Analysis Based on Synonymy

According to Erasmus, synonymy means “using different words which indicate the same thing” (Erasmus, 1978, p. 307). The extensive use of synonyms helps to avoid the monotonous repetition of words, adding to the richness of the poem’s expression and to the aesthetic appeal of the text. The application of Copia makes much use of synonyms to express the same meaning through different forms, giving the poems greater richness and variety.

- (4) 岂曰无衣？与子同**袍**。王于兴师，修我**戈矛**，与子**同仇**！
岂曰无衣？与子同**泽**。王于兴师，修我**矛戟**，与子**偕作**！
岂曰无衣？与子同**裳**。王于兴师，修我**甲兵**，与子**偕行**！

This is a poem that eulogizes the passionate sentiments of the soldiers of the Qin Empire who are fighting against their enemies. The poem contains three sets of rhetorical synonyms: “袍, 泽, 裳”, “戈矛, 矛戟, 甲兵”, and “偕行, 偕作, 同仇”. Although the

original meaning of the word “袍” refers to a long garment shaped like a cloak, “泽” refers to a sweatshirt, and “裳” refers to a lower garment, in this verse all three words mean “clothes”. The words “戈矛, 矛戟, 甲兵” all refer to weapons. The phrases “偕行, 偕作, 同仇” all mean their common indignation.

4.4 Analysis Based on Onomatopoeia

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary (Fourth Edition), onomatopoeia refers to the “combination of sounds in a word that imitates or suggests what the word refers to e.g. hiss, cuckoo, thud” (Hornby, 1997, p. 1023). Onomatopoeia has the characteristic of being diverse, which indicates Copia in its richness of expression. Onomatopoeia has the function of increasing expressiveness within texts and in spoken language to give it greater intensity and strength.

(5) 关关雎鸠，在河之洲。

(6) 呦呦鹿鸣，食野之苹。

(7) 习习谷风，以阴以雨。

All three of these classic poems use onomatopoeia flexibly. In verse ^[5], “关关” refers to the harmonious chirping of water birds, the osprey accompanying each other on the riverbank, whose crisp, cheerful chirping also makes the man wonder about the beautiful woman in pursuit of a beautiful love. In verse ^[6], “呦呦” refers to the sound of a group of deer merrily chirping as they nibble on mugwort in the vast wilderness, describing a harmonious, bright, and cheerful scene. And ahead of this fresh and beautiful sound of nature are the ritualistic sounds of a gentleman feasting on his guests, blowing on his Sheng (笙) and drumming on his reeds, and plucking on his Se (瑟) in clear and harmonious layers, which is very distinct from the description of “习习” in verse ^[7].

4.5 Analysis Based on Change in Sentence Form

According to Erasmus, the change in sentence form refers to “the expression is also varied when it is given the different cast, a different outer grab so to speak, which we may for the moment call a change of form; that is, the form of a statement” (Yuan, 2013, p. 123). In The Book of Songs, sentence forms change regularly to express the richness of the poet’s sentiments and expressions.

(8) 绸缪束薪，三星在天。今夕何夕？见此良人！子兮子兮！如此良人何！

绸缪束刍，三星在隅。今夕何夕？见此邂逅！子兮子兮！如此邂逅何！

绸缪束楚，三星在户。今夕何夕？见此粲者！子兮子兮！如此粲者何！

From a modern linguistic point of view, sentences can be classified into four categories: exclamatory, imperative, interrogative, and declarative. The poems in The Book of Songs also have these four types of sentences. In this poem, the first two lines are declarative, and the next is interrogative, followed by three exclamatory lines. This complex variation of syntax contains declarative, exclamatory, and interrogative forms, and the text has a sense of rhythm and variety that helps to evoke emotional resonance in the reader.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigates Erasmus’ Copia based on a case study of The Book of Songs, in which poems are characterized by their richness in both expression and subject-matter. The “abundance of expression” and “abundance of subject-matter” can not only contribute to the richness of style but also highlight the poems’ main characters’ personalities and reveal the poets’ thoughts.

In The Book of Songs, the prominent poems display a variety of ways to achieve richness of expression. The use of metaphor, synonymy, onomatopoeia, and change in sentence form avoids simple repetition and makes the expression more abundant, rhythmic, and innovative. Such a technique may serve as a stimulus for using well-known Western rhetorical concepts to study Chinese traditional classics and encourage the use of Copia in future writing.

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