

The Analysis of Self-image in Yu Qian's Poetry

Fang Yu,
Kanokporn Numtong and Kewalee Petcharatip
Kasetsart University, Thailand
Corresponding Author, E-mail: fangcty@qq.com

Abstract

The objectives of this research were 1) to analyze the depictions of self-image in the 623 poems contained in *The Collected Works of Yu Qian*. 2) to classify the types of self-image into meaningful dimensions or aspects. The sample are 623 poems written by Yu Qian. They were selected by a comprehensive examination of all poems authored by Yu Qian within the aforementioned book. The research instrument for the data collection was a thematic analysis framework specifically designed for interpreting the 623 poems and analyzing the portrayal of the poet's self-image within them. The statistics for data analysis involved qualitative techniques such as literature research, descriptive analysis, and thematic analysis.

The research results were found as follows:

The study identifies four types of self-image — external, spiritual, social, and family. 2) The external image encompasses various personas such as a brave general, a homesick traveler, a leisurely literati, and a lonely or elderly poet. 3) The spiritual image emphasizes Yu Qian's noble character, unwavering integrity, nostalgic emotions, optimism, open-mindedness, lofty ambitions, vigor and unrestrainedness. 4) The social image highlights his reputation as an upright and incorruptible official, as well as someone who possessed deep affection and sincerity. 5) The family image portrays Yu Qian as a filial son, a devoted husband, and an affectionate father. By examining Yu Qian's self-image through his poetry, this analysis contributes to a better understanding of both his literary works and the history of the Ming Dynasty. It is recommended that future investigations delve into Yu Qian and his poetry, exploring themes such as his experiences with different seasons, encounters with natural elements, and interactions with various emperors during his lifetime.

Keywords: Poetry; Self-Image; *The Collected Works of Yu Qian*; Classification

Introduction

Yu Qian, a prominent minister during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), was a diligent and honest official who significantly contributed to the reign. From a young age, he had high ambitions and dedicated himself to protecting his nation and its citizens. He began his official career at the age of 24 and served as a provincial governor of Xunfu in both Henan and Shanxi provinces for 18 years, actively engaging with the local populace (Qian, 2006: 46). Yu Qian was deeply inspired by Wen Tianxiang, a national hero from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), to the point where he honored Wen's portrait and tablet at home (Sun, 1999: 1).

Several historical events took place during Yu Qian's lifetime. First, the Tumubao Crisis (Gu, 1977: 49) occurred when Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty (Ming Yingzong) led an expedition but was later defeated and captured. The high-ranking officials led by Yu Qian supported Emperor Jing (Ming Jingdi), the younger brother of Ming Yingzong,

to ascend the throne as the new emperor, seeking stability and continuity. Second, the Defense of Beijing (Gu, 1977: 50) refers to the victorious battle led by Yu Qian to protect Beijing. Third, the "Coup d'état of Throne" (Gu, 1977: 52) involved the move to restore Ming Yingzong's power and dethrone Ming Jingdi. Xu Youzhen, a traitor, proposed killing Yu Qian, who was supporting Ming Jingdi, to justify the restoration. Despite Ming Yingzong acknowledging Yu Qian's merits, he ultimately decided to publicly execute him. In the Year Dinghai, "Yu Qian was beheaded in the bazaar, his properties were confiscated, and his family was sent away to guard the border" (Zhang, 2011: 104). Later, during the reign of Ming Xianzong, Ming Yingzong's son, Yu Qian's status was restored and his contributions were recognized, ultimately leading to his rise as a national hero (Zhang, 2011: 105).

While Yu Qian achieved progress in his political career, he also had remarkable accomplishments in literature. From a young age of six, he displayed exceptional talent in creating couplets with his uncle (Sun, 1999: 1). Not only was he an outstanding politician and military strategist in the Ming Dynasty, but he also excelled as a poet, channeling his thoughts, emotions, and experiences into his writings. His poetry encompassed themes such as love for the people, sympathy for the suffering of the working class, and a deep patriotic spirit. Throughout his life, Yu Qian upheld the principle, "Accomplishments come to the court, blessings belong to the people" (Yu, 2015: 195). It was inevitable that his poetry would include numerous verses about his country and its people. His writings reflected the socio-economic realities of that time, and sincerely conveyed his concern for the people. In contrast to using romantic themes, his poems mirrored the everyday lives of people. Since rain, snow, and weather, in general, are natural elements that impact people's lives, he frequently incorporated them into his poetry. He showed genuine care for the people's well-being, including the state of their harvest. Additionally, the military themes in his poetry showcased his strong sense of patriotism.

The present research aims to delve into the analysis of self-image in Yu Qian's poetry and categorize them into meaningful dimensions or aspects. Through a systematic examination of the 623 poems in *The Collected Works of Yu Qian*, the authors seek to unveil Yu Qian's portrayal of self-image in his poetry. They also explore the significance of these images to Yu Qian personally and within the context of his era. Through this research, it aims to gain a deeper understanding of Yu Qian's literary style and thematic content, as well as his position and influence in Chinese literary history.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the depictions of self-image in the 623 poems contained in *The Collected Works of Yu Qian*.
2. To classify the types of self-image into meaningful dimensions or aspects.

Literature Review

The Theory of "Self-image"

One of the earliest theories about self-image was proposed by the renowned psychologist Maurice Rosenberg (1965). In his book "Society and the Adolescent Self-Image," he introduced one of the most widely cited psychological scales to date — the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Gnambs et al., 2018). Since then, there has been continued interest in the concept of "self." Much attention has been focused on related concepts such as self-esteem (Ayduk et al., 2009), self-concept (Yahaya & Ramli, 2009; Kaur et al., 2009), self-worth (Covington, 1984), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1978; Ormrod et al., 2023), and self-confidence (Beattie et al., 2004). As a result, there is still no unified theory of self-image.

However, it is widely recognized that an individual's sense of reality serves as the foundation for their self-image. This sense of self is developed throughout a lifetime and can be modified as circumstances change. Self-image represents an individual's perception and evaluation of themselves. Elaine and Ruth (1992: 46) emphasize the significance of self-image in personal development, arguing that the state individuals achieve in later years reflects their self-image from early life.

Bailey (2003) defines self-image as the totality of subjective perceptions of oneself, including body image, impressions of character, abilities, and self-concept. It is a synthesis of an individual's mental picture, appearance, experiences, desires, and feelings. These self-images can be either negative, instilling doubt in one's abilities and ideas, or positive, fostering confidence in one's ideas and actions. Ultimately, self-image is a crucial aspect of an individual's self-perception.

Research on Yu Qian in Chinese Academic Literature

Current research on Yu Qian in the Chinese academic field has been growing in depth, yielding fruitful research findings (Li, 2022). The research on Yu Qian covers various aspects, including the cause of his death (Huang, 2004; Du, 2005; Liu, 1998; Chen, 2001; Chen, 2006; Zhao, 2011; Wang, 2006; Qian & Ye, 2009; Li, 2010; Zhu, 2012), his governance (Zhang, 2002; Niu, 2008; Qian & Shi, 2011), his posthumous affairs (Zhang, 2011: 104; Wei, 2007; Yan, 2000; Chen, 2004), and his thoughts and personality (Lin, 2007; Jiang, 2001; Zhao, 2018).

Most previous studies on Yu Qian's poetry have focused on his spirit of patriotism and love for the people, as well as his thoughts and feelings of concern for the people (Qian & Xiang, 1999; Xu, 2005; Qian, 2006; He, 2011). They have also analyzed his image as a great national hero. Early works examined Yu Qian's image portrayal as a reputable and honest official, a person of noble character and unwavering integrity, or a national hero who protects and defends his country's borders. However, his poetry offers other facets of self-image that warrant further research. Thus, this paper aims to contribute to providing a multiple-angle in-depth analysis of the various types of self-image found in Yu Qian's poetry.

Research Methodology

Methods

A qualitative method was adopted in this paper, which included literature research, descriptive analysis, and thematic analysis methods. Achieving the critical findings of this paper in examining the self-image of Yu Qian in his poems.

Data Collection procedure

The following steps were observed while conducting this investigation: First, relevant literature that mentioned Yu Qian, including the era when he was alive and after his death, was collected. This included the Ming Dynasty history book "History of the Ming Dynasty", "Chronicle of the Ming Dynasty", Yu Qian's personal biography "The Collected Works of Yu Qian", "Feng Shu Yu Gao--Yu Qian Zhuan", "The Prime Minister Yu Qian who Saved the Situation", "The Prime Minister Yu Qian who Saved the Situation", "The Collected Works of Yu Zhongsu", and "Research on Yu Qian", etc. Second, classified all poems created by Yu Qian which contained in The Collected Works of Yu Qian into themes. Third, reviewed related research on Yu Qian as well as different images in his poetry.

Data Analysis

This paper used descriptive analysis to analyze Yu Qian's poetry and reviewed previous research on his literary works, focusing on his self-image and analyzing the collected literature materials. It also analyzed Yu Qian's self-image by using existing literature and academic research results and employing thematic analysis. It classified themes, identities, and creative backgrounds, using comparative and inductive methods for comprehensive exploration.

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of poetry by various genres contained in The Collected Works of Yu Qian, published by Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House in 2015. There were 623 poems, including 74 miscellaneous poetry, 61 five-character regulated poetry, 348 seven-character regulated poetry, 49 five-character quatrain poetry, and 91 seven-character quatrain poetry.

Table 1 Distribution of poems by genre in The Collected Works of Yu Qian

Genre	Miscellaneous poetry	Five-character regulated poetry	Seven-character regulated poetry	Five-character quatrain poetry	Seven-character quatrain poetry
Quantity	74	61	348	49	91
Percent	11.88%	9.79%	55.86%	7.87%	14.61%

Research Conceptual Framework

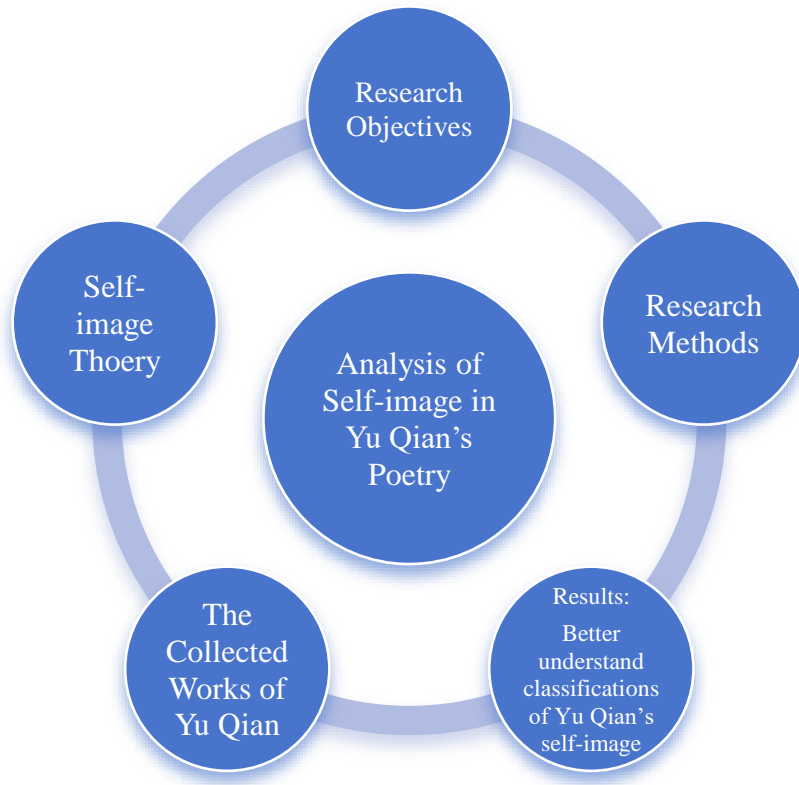


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework

Research Results

To fulfill the objectives of this research, the authors conducted a detailed analysis of the 623 poems contained in The Collected Works of Yu Qian. The findings are presented below, aligning with the stated research objectives.

1. Analysis of Depictions of Self-Image

The analysis revealed four primary types of self-images portrayed in Yu Qian's poetry: spiritual image, external image, social image, and family image. Among these, spiritual image was the most prominent, accounting for 45% of the poems analyzed, followed by an external image (38%), a social image (13%), and a family image (5%). This suggests a strong emphasis on spiritual themes in Yu Qian's writings. It appears that nation comes second, people come third, and family comes fourth. The distribution of self-image types is further detailed in Figure 1.

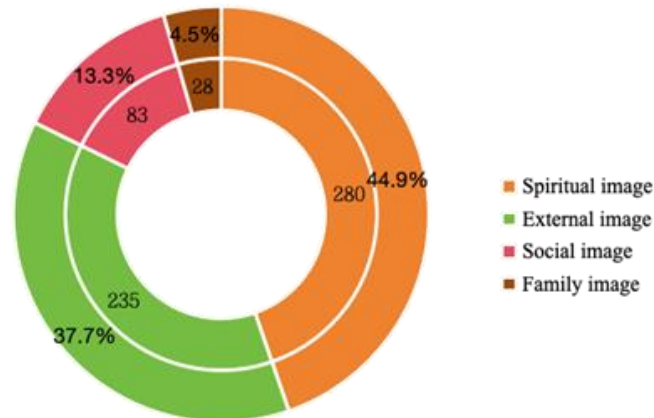


Figure 2 Classifications of self-image in Yu Qian's Poetry (N=623)

2. Classification of Self-Image Types

The classification of self-image types yielded meaningful dimensions and aspects within Yu Qian's poetry. Each type of self-image was further explored and categorized to provide a comprehensive understanding. Spiritual image, for example, was classified into noble character and unwavering integrity, nostalgic emotions, optimism and open-mindedness, lofty ambitions, and vigor and unrestrainedness. Similarly, external image was categorized into a homesick traveler, leisurely literati, lonely or elderly poet, and brave general. Social image encompassed the portrayal of an upright and incorruptible official and a person characterized by deep affection and sincerity. Family image included depictions of a devoted husband, filial son, and affectionate father. Detailed findings and analyses for each type of self-image are presented below, providing insights into Yu Qian's multifaceted portrayal of himself across various dimensions.

2.1. Spiritual Image

The spiritual image portrayed in Yu Qian's poems is depicted through his noble character and unwavering integrity (59%), nostalgic emotions (19%), optimism and open-mindedness (17%), lofty ambitions (3%), and vigor and unrestrainedness (1%) (Figure 3).

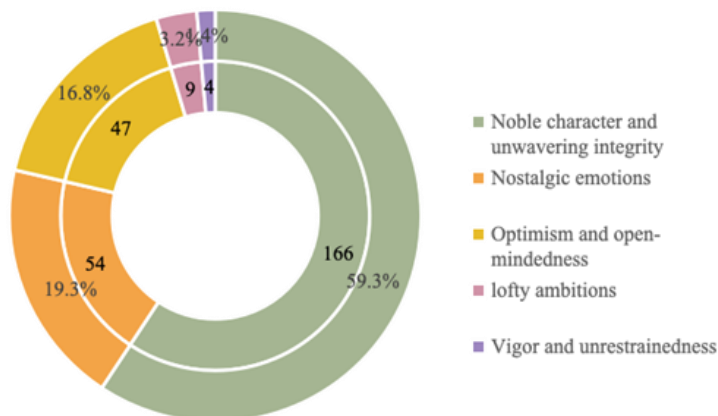


Figure 3 Distribution of spiritual image types in Yu Qian's poetry (N=280)

It can be argued that when shaping his spiritual image, Yu Qian primarily expressed his qualities of noble character and unwavering integrity. This perfectly aligns with his personal pursuit of living a clean and simple life, free from worldly personal ambitions, with the pursuit of fame and fortune. He was a sensitive and passionate individual, which is reflected in some of his poems that express sentimental contemplation. Throughout his career, he faced challenges and unrealized ambitions, and only he truly understood the hardships encountered along the way. However, he faced these difficulties with an optimistic and open-minded attitude. While he was deeply influenced by Confucianism and exhibited humility in his demeanor, there was also a streak of vigor and unrestrainedness in Yu Qian's heart.

2.1.1 Noble Character and Unwavering Integrity

Yu Qian believed that fame and wealth are transient, like passing clouds in the sky; they are merely external possessions. These things do not slow down the aging process or extend one's lifespan. After death, one's existence returns to the earth as a mere handful of soil. Additionally, an individual's wealth or poverty is determined by fate, so there is no need to actively seek or pursue it. He firmly believed that the most valuable assets in life were integrity and reputation (Niu, 2007). Therefore, his top priority was to maintain his integrity and reputation, to the extent that he would not hesitate to sacrifice his life for it.

In traditional Chinese culture, bamboo, plum, orchid, and chrysanthemum were known as the Four Gentlemen in the Garden. Bamboo, along with pine and plum, is named Friends of the Three in the Cold Season (Ma, 2008). Bamboo received widespread attention in ancient poetry. Ancient Chinese poets frequently referred to bamboo in their poetry because it symbolized humility, integrity, steadfastness, and incorruptibility. It represents resilience against coercion and temptation, as well as the unwavering persistence of the self. Yu Qian's poetry also contains references to bamboo. Take the poem "Moving Bamboo" as an instance:

I moved treasures closer to the painting hall.
Our concerns match the coldness of winter.
High branches aspire to reach the celestial realm.
Strong bamboo branches still aim to stand proud amidst snow and frost.
In the quiet night, I accompany you with the zither.
During the day, I move the couch to provide you with a cool place.
In the morning, I will hold you and face the sky.
I blow towards the enlightened court, summing the phoenix.

This poem depicts Yu Qian's transplanting of bamboo, using it as a metaphor to express his noble sentiments and grand ambitions. He described various scenes, including finding solace in bamboo during difficult times, praising its tenacity, enjoying moments of solitude and self-reflection, and expressing lofty aspirations and noble ideals. following scenes. These scenes exemplify Yu Qian's noble integrity, lofty character, and independent personality. His companionship with bamboo serves as both a tribute to the qualities of bamboo itself and a testament to his unwavering integrity, firm beliefs, and noble character.

2.1.2 Nostalgic Emotions

The feelings of mourning in spring and lamenting in autumn are commonly found in the poetry of ancient literati. Similar thoughts and emotions are discovered in Yu Qian's poetry. He did not only express the sadness of spring and autumn but also lamented the passage of time, the brevity of life, and life changes.

Autumn is a desolate season, filled with sadness and farewells. Take the poem "Autumn Feelings" as an example:

The autumn wind rises over the pond.
The water inside becomes cool.
The lotus has a beautiful color.
But sadly, it cannot resist the frost.

This poem depicts the arrival of autumn as well as expresses that although the lotus is colorful, it is unfortunate that it cannot withstand the invasion of autumn frost. By describing the scenery and emotions of autumn, he conveyed his feelings about the passage of time and the impermanence of life. The poem is filled with sorrow and sadness, embodying Yu Qian's profound contemplation on the fleeting nature of life and his nostalgic self-image.

2.1.3 Optimism and Open-mindedness

Yu Qian's upright character guarantees that his political career would not be a smooth road. Whether serving as an official in the court or as a provincial governor on inspection tours, his impartiality offended both the powerful officials in the court and the wealthy and corrupt local elites. Therefore, many people wanted to frame him or kill him. Faced with these hostile forces and the hardships of life, Yu Qian did not lose heart. Instead, he maintained an optimistic and open-minded attitude, facing everything with composure. It is depicted in the poem "On a Cold New Year's Eve":

I tell those who roam.
To make light of cold.
Spring wind will soon come.
Eastwards as foretold. (Xu, 2008: 141)

The poet sighed on a cold New Year's Eve. He expressed that, although the weather was chilly, there was no need to worry. Because spring is just around the corner, dispelling loneliness and sorrow. This poem is rich in philosophical significance and insights into life. It conveys to people that just as cold weather does not last forever; difficulties are also temporary. One should uplift his spirit and see the bright prospects beyond difficulties. Symbolic techniques were employed to portray his philosophical and upbeat spirit, including fearlessness in the face of hardships, disdain for adverse weather conditions, and the confidence to struggle against unfavorable environments.

2.1.4 Lofty Ambitions

Yu Qian, since childhood, has had lofty ambitions of defending his country and making contributions. He possessed an overflowing passion—"this passion, where to pour it" (Zhang, 1974: 4549). Although he embarked on his political career at the age of 24, the journey had not been smooth sailing. Nevertheless, he did not care about the rank of his official position. His wholehearted desire was to serve his country and its people. However, being entrenched in the political arena, Yu Qian, who has always maintained his integrity, could not avoid offending the powerful and influential. As a result, he had been framed and demoted from his position. Whenever he felt frustrated by the situation, Yu Qian sighed over his unfulfilled ambitions, lamenting how he was not able to fully utilize his talents and achieve his aspirations. Take the poem "Autumn Night" as an example:

My bold spirit does not yield to the encroaching autumn.
Walking towards the steps, taking a moonlit stroll.

These lines express Yu Qian's inner ambition and helplessness. Despite the unbearable cold of autumn, his ambitions and emotions remained intact. He chose to rise and walk towards the jade steps illuminated by the moonlight, symbolizing his refusal to bow down to adversity and his hopeful outlook on the future. This depiction presents his hope that, despite his temporary failure to realize ambitions, there will be opportunities in the future to achieve them.

2.1.5 Vigor and Unrestrainedness

Yu Qian had a deep sense of pride within him, which is reflected in his poetry. Many of his poems embody an image of vigor and unrestrainedness. It is worth noting that this image of Yu Qian is often associated with the image of "wine." One example of this can be found in his poem "Drinking Alone":

Uncorking the wine jug, drinking alone before the flowers.
Singing with my face upturned, my voice piercing through the heavens. ...
Drunk, I gaze at the bright moon, illuminating the splendid scenery.
Let the fallen petals cover the ground like a bed.

In the first two lines, Yu Qian portrayed himself drinking alone and singing loudly. He looked up at the sky and sang, his voice resonating through the clouds. This behavior exemplifies his vigor and unrestrainedness. The last two lines depict him appreciating the bright moon and using fallen petals as a bed after becoming drunk. He demonstrated his freedom from worldly constraints and his free expression of his emotions. He thoroughly enjoyed this sense of freedom and boldness.

2.2. External Image

In Yu Qian's poetry, the external image is divided into a brave general, a homesick traveler, a leisurely literati, and a lonely or elderly poet. As shown in Figure 2, about 40 percent of Yu Qian's poetry reflects his self-image as a homesick traveler, which is the same percentage as the portrayal of a leisurely literati. The lonely or elderly poet image accounts for 16 percent, while the image of a brave general only constitutes 4 percent.

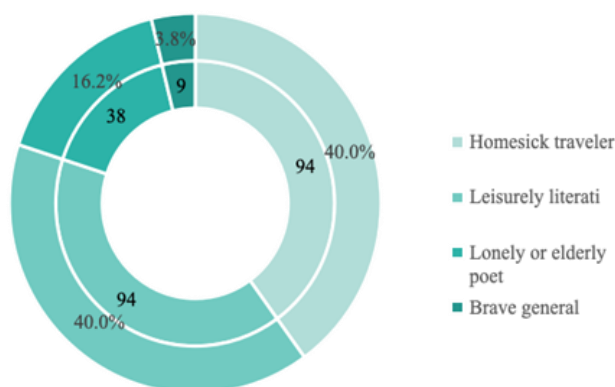


Figure 4 Distribution of external image types in Yu Qian's poetry (N=235)

It can be argued that when shaping these external images, Yu Qian tends to express himself more as a leisurely literati and a traveling official away from home, rather than focusing on other aspects. The sense of loneliness that comes from being far away from home and loved ones for extended periods, as well as the hardships of old age, also inspire Yu Qian's creativity. He is a person who is wholeheartedly devoted to serving his country and the people, unconcerned about personal achievements, and deeply devout and humble. Therefore, there are not many poems by Yu Qian that portray him as a brave general defending the homeland.

2.2.1 Homesick Traveler

At the age of 24, Yu Qian left his hometown and went to the capital to serve as an official in the imperial court. Living away from home for a long time inevitably leads to strong feelings of homesickness. Therefore, the theme of missing one's hometown is an indispensable subject in his poetry. Yu Qian is a literati from the misty and rainy southern region of the Yangtze River (Jiangnan). Naturally, he possesses the sentimentality and gentleness typical of literati. His homesickness is also well reflected in his poetry.

The famous poet Wang Wei of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) in China once expressed homesickness for his hometown and loved ones in two lines of his poetry.

Alone, a lonely stranger in a foreign land.
I doubly pine for kinsfolk on a holiday (Xu, 2023: 124).

These two lines describe his strong feelings as a guest in a foreign land. The farther away he was from home, the stronger his longing for family and his hometown became. He calmly narrated the sense of wandering and contained his feeling of homesickness. Since then, these two sentences have often been used by Chinese people to express their homesickness and love for their relatives.

Yu Qian had a similar experience of traveling to a foreign land as Wang Wei. In his poems about the Taihang Mountain, there are themes of missing his hometown and loved ones, such as "Ascending the Taihang Mountains and Missing Relatives":

The horse hooves and the dust from the carriage are never idle.
I Pass through Taihang Mountain twice a year.
Within the courtyard, wisps of lonely clouds float.
How long before the homesick traveler returns home.

The first two sentences of this poem depict the poet's busy life and his frequent travels through Taihang Mountain. His arduous journey was vividly portrayed by the horse's footsteps and the dust from the carriage. It also implies that his whereabouts were uncertain and that he often needed to travel long distances. The last two sentences express Yu Qian's homesickness. It gives a hazy and distant visual effect, enhancing the poet's feeling of homesickness. The last sentence directly expresses his longing for his relatives. In this poem, he expresses his deep homesickness and longing for relatives by depicting his observations and feelings while ascending the Taihang Mountain, thereby revealing his profound nostalgia for his hometown and affection for his family.

2.2.2 Leisurely Literati

Yu Qian, an official of the imperial court, was constantly occupied with government affairs day and night. However, despite dedicating his entire life to serving his country and its people, this had not affected his leisurely mindset as a literati influenced by Confucian culture. Yu Qian was a traditional scholar-official who aspired to a life that combined both serving in government and living in seclusion. Yu Qian's leisurely disposition is found in many of his poems. For example, on a summer evening, he composed a poem titled "Walking Under the Moon on a Summer Night", which vividly describes the nocturnal scenery.

The bright moon enters my home.
The gentle breeze brushes against my clothes.
Strolling down the jade steps.
I look up at the sparkling stars.
All sounds are silenced.
Every creature rests.
Loud singing resounds through the woods.
Birds compete in fights.
As my joy reaches its peak, I return home.
Few understand this sentiment.

This poem portrays the natural scenery of a summer night and the poet's emotional expression, revealing his leisurely and tranquil attitude towards life and his inner world. He used elements of nature, such as the bright moon, gentle breeze, twinkling stars, and dense woods, as media for his expression. Through vivid descriptions and imaginative metaphors, he depicted the beauty and serenity of the summer night in detail. At the same time, he also expressed his love for life and his aspirations through internal monologue and emotional release. The entire poem exudes a leisurely and tranquil atmosphere, immersing readers in its beauty and allowing them to appreciate the wonders of nature and life.

2.2.3 Lonely or Elderly Poet

Yu Qian distinguished himself at a young age, leaving his hometown early to serve as an official elsewhere. Years of wandering and being separated from his family made him particularly sensitive to the passage of time. Additionally, his wife, Lady Dong, passed away when Yu Qian was 49 years old, making his later years even more lonely and unbearable. As a result, many of his poems reflect themes of lamenting the passage of time and loneliness. In these poems, he portrays himself as a lonely elder, deeply lamenting the past.

In quiet nights, Yu Qian's countless thoughts often flood his mind, prompting him to express his feelings. This was especially true as he grew older, as written in "A Tranquil Night":

The spring breeze and autumn moon wait for no one.
In the blink of an eye, crimson faces turn white-haired.
Luxury, once gone, is hard to regain.
Vigor fades, leaving only a mound of earth.

In this poem, he reflects on the passage of time. In the blink of an eye, the once-beautiful face has turned into that of an elderly person with gray hair, no longer youthful. He believed that though wealth and glory have been lost, and may be difficult to regain, when a person's ambitions and spirits are dashed, it is as if they are alive yet dead. As long as one can maintain their integrity, nothing else matters. This highlights the lonely and desolate emotions of the elderly poet, while also indicating Yu Qian's steadfast determination to uphold integrity.

As a literati, Yu Qian, like many other ancient literati, also harbored feelings of sorrow in spring and melancholy in autumn. This is especially true when he was alone, such as in "Sitting Alone in the Rainy Spring Night":

Sitting there, my heart is filled with sorrow and helplessness.
Alone, feeling unable to dispel my melancholy.
The night is deep, with dim lights.
The wind is strong, and the rain doesn't cease.
Memories are as clear as if hung on a bright mirror.
Life is like drifting with the waves.
When will I be able to take a stroll by the lake?
To enjoy some wine and listen to the fishermen's songs?

In this poem, Yu Qian was alone in the rainy spring night. As he sat and watched the rain, he was inspired to express his feelings. His reflections on life, memories of the past, and longing for freedom in the distance are triggered by the sound of rain. Through the depiction of the rainy night and the expression of his inner emotion, he shaped the image of a lonely elderly person.

2.2.4 Brave General

Yu Qian has always had high hopes and is committed to protecting the nation. He served as the Minister of Military Affairs in the Ming Dynasty, which is equivalent to the Minister of National Defense today. The victory in the "Defense of Beijing" not only showcased his military prowess but also highlighted his heroic image as a brave general. After the "Defense of Beijing," Yu Qian strengthened the defense of the imperial capital by reforming the old system of the Beijing garrison and establishing a system of regimental camps. Faced with the unstable situation at the national borders and the invasion of enemy forces, Yu Qian advocated for guarding the frontiers to prevent enemy incursions and the outbreak of war. One of the prominent themes in Yu Qian's poetry is opposing foreign invasion. He called on soldiers and civilians to unite and resist, swearing to defend their homeland to the death. During his time guarding the borders and defending the nation, Yu Qian also created some poems. Although there are few poems on such themes, they are enough to reflect Yu Qian's image as a brave general full of patriotism.

In the "Defense of Beijing," Yu Qian personally led the troops, commanding an army of 220,000 to defeat the invading forces of the Wala. This battle brought him instant fame. Afterward, he composed another poem titled "Entering the Frontier". This poem depicts the Ming Dynasty troops returning to the capital city, their military might majestic, and their spirits jubilant. It shows the theme of Yu Qian's resolute opposition to the unjust struggle launched by foreign enemies. To guarantee that people were living and working in peace and contentment, he believed that border defenses would be combined. This also truthfully reflects the ethnic conflicts of that time and summarizes the patriotic sentiments of the vast number of

civilians and soldiers in the north. Some lines of the poem are as follows:

The general returns with the aura of a tiger.
A hundred thousand warriors compete to cheer and inspire.
The general's orders are strict and cannot be disobeyed.
The feathered letter urges troops to depart for the capital.

The first two sentences depict the magnificent return of the general and the high morale of the soldiers. By using metaphors and exaggeration, he compared the general to a tiger, showing his bravery and ferocity. At the same time, the scene of soldiers competing to encourage each other also reflects the unity and morale of the troops, showing the heroic leadership of the general. The last two lines of the poem depict the scene of the general receiving an urgent order and having to leave his hometown and rush back to the capital immediately. It presents the brave and resolute image of the general in the war. Therefore, these sentences depict the commanding presence of the general, his decisiveness and sense of responsibility in war, as well as the high morale of the soldiers. These portray the image of the brave general. Lü (1995) evaluates the poem "Entering the Frontier" and believes that Yu Qian fervently praised the great victories against aggressive wars in these poems, reflecting his strong desire for a peaceful life.

2.3. Social Image

In analyzing Yu Qian's poetry, two main social images emerge: the upright and incorruptible official and the person characterized by deep affection and sincerity (Figure 5). Among Yu Qian's works, 38 poems (46%) depict the former, reflecting his lifelong integrity and concern for society, while 45 poems (54%) portray the latter, showcasing his genuine care for others. Notably, about 54% of his poetry highlights his personal image of deep affection and sincerity, followed by his portrayal as an upright official (46%). His genuine treatment of others, particularly his friends, is evident throughout his poetry, revealing his humble and righteous nature.

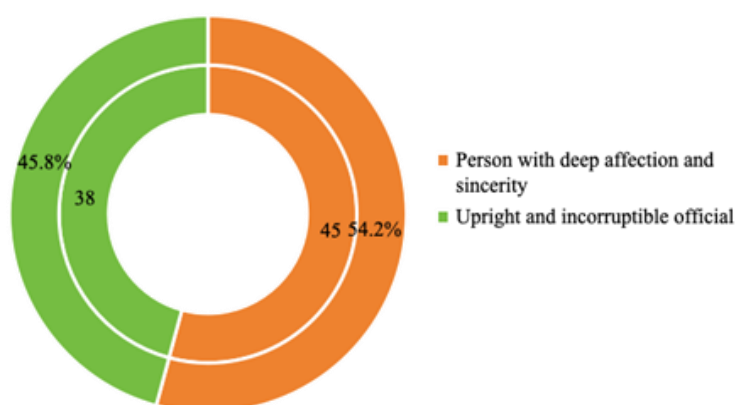


Figure 5 Distribution of social image types in Yu Qian's poetry (N=83)

2.3.1 Person with Deep Affection and Sincerity

Yu Qian is also known for his loyalty and compassion. Whether he was interacting with friends, ordinary people, or household servants, he was consistently affectionate and sincere. For example, "Farewell to Shen Pingzhi in Zhengzhou":

Conversing by candlelight until late into the night.
It is ideal to grow old alongside a kindred spirit.
Perhaps awakening eyes will encounter the golden goblet.

The poem portrays a scene where Yu Qian and his friend were engaged in a late-night conversation. They sat by the candlelight and talked until the late hours. He desired lasting companionship with his friend, demonstrating his appreciation and pursuit of real friendship.

2.3.2 Upright and Incorruptible Official

Yu Qian was a consistently upright and incorruptible official throughout his entire life. He never oppressed or exploited people for their resources. During the period in which Yu Qian lived, government corruption was rampant, bribery was commonplace, and officials engaged in widespread misconduct. It was customary for local officials to bring abundant local products as gifts to gain approval when visiting the capital to discuss official business with the emperor. However, as the governor of Shanxi, Yu Qian always entered the court empty-handed. Some suggested to him that even if he did not bring gold or silver, he should at least bring some local specialties or similar items, such as handkerchiefs, incense, or dried mushrooms, to distribute among the courtiers upon arrival in the capital. However, Yu Qian, did not agree with this suggestion and even wrote a poem titled "Entering the Capital" to express his stance:

A handkerchief, mushrooms, and incense.
What benefits the people becomes their harm.
Entering the capital with clean hands and a conscience.
Avoiding the idle gossip of others.

This poem satirized the prevalent corrupt practices of forming cliques and presenting gifts in the officialdom of that time. It showcased Yu Qian's unwavering integrity, his commitment to his principles, and his refusal to compromise with corruption. Even when meeting the emperor, he remained dignified and upright. His honesty and integrity inspire both awe and respect. In later generations, people often use the phrase "Two sleeves of clean breeze" as a metaphor for clean and upright governance.

2.4. Family Image

Yu Qian, a dedicated official to the nation, prioritized service to the country over family. Despite his devotion, prolonged periods away from home led to a sense of longing and melancholy. His poetry reflects three family images: filial son, devoted husband, and affectionate father (Figure 6). Among these, 61% depict him as a devoted husband, followed by a filial son (25%) and an affectionate father (14%).

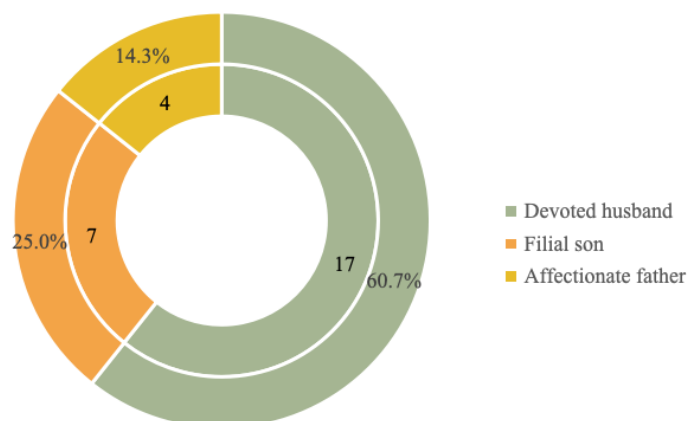


Figure 6 Distribution of family image types in Yu Qian's poetry (N=28)

2.4.1 Devoted Husband

At the age of 24, Yu Qian married Lady Dong, the daughter of the Hanlin scholar Dong Yong. Lady Dong was known for her virtue, gentleness, and grace. She was frugal and filial to her parents-in-law. They had a son named Yu Mian and a daughter named Yu Qiongying. Despite living together for over twenty years, Yu Qian and his wife often resided in two different places due to his busy schedule with national affairs. Nevertheless, their relationship remained close, as his well-born wife frequently wrote to him. After her death, Yu Qian made a vow not to remarry or take a concubine. He loved his wife deeply and remained faithful to her for his rest life.

Yu Qian wrote many poems expressing his love for his wife. See in the poem "Sending to My Wife":

We are a couple married for the first time.
The love between us is deep and mutual.
I am honored to be appointed as a junior official.
I have served as a governor, patrolling and governing border areas.
You reside in Beijing.
Our household gate is quiet day and night.
I am writing this poem to thank you for all you've done for the family.
I hope you understand my absence by your side.
Pine and cypress trees remain firm even in cold years.
We will always protect each other.

This poem reflects the deep and mutual love shared by Yu Qian and his wife, comparing it to the enduring nature of pine and cypress trees in winter. He also conveyed his profound love for his wife and his gratitude to her for playing a significant role in managing their household.

2.4.2 Filial Son

Yu Qian was influenced by his father's integrity since childhood and aspired to serve his country and its people. He is a filial son to his parents. See in the poem "The Sense of the Beginning of Spring":

One inch of resolute heart to repay the country.
Two lines of clear tears for missing parents.

This poem expresses Yu Qian's deep emotions. On one hand, he possessed a steadfast determination to serve his country and was willing to sacrifice everything for the nation. On the other hand, he also deeply missed his parents, and longing brought tears to his eyes. Despite being far from home and working hard for people, he always remembered his parents. His longing is so intense that he felt conflicted between serving his country and being with his parents, depicting his filial piety.

2.4.3 Affectionate Father

Yu Qian often spent long periods away from home, rarely accompanying his family. As a father, he deeply cared about the growth of his children. He had always been strict with his son but showed a more tender side towards his daughter. This may be due to the differences caused by the high expectations placed on sons during feudal times (Li, 2010: 167). Because of his long-term official duties away from home, he had very few days to spend with his wife and children. He felt guilty for not being able to witness their growth.

"Far Apart" reflects Yu Qian's paternal love for his son and the deep bond between them. A few lines from the poem read as:

The bond of love between father and son is even deeper.
It is pitiful that we cannot always be together.
Farewell, far away from each other.
Unending sorrow.

In this poem, Yu Qian was about to leave his family and embark on a journey far away. He did not know when he would be able to return and reunite with his family again. He was filled with reluctance in his heart. The bond between Yu Qian and his son was profound. Nevertheless, although Yu Qian held a high position and was a national hero who contributed greatly to the court, he never sought to secure an official position or title for his son based on his own merits. He also refused to accept the title granted by the court to his son.

Yu Qian supported his daughter's freedom to pursue love and eventually helped her choose a good husband. He openly expressed his affection and love for his daughter without reservation, as mentioned in "Recalling Qiongying":

It has been three years since I parted with Qiongying.
I often see you in my dreams, kneeling before me.
Your sweet and compassionate demeanor is lovely.
Your pleasant and innocent nature is also pitiful.

This poem expresses his fond memories of his daughter. It describes how he often dreamt of his daughter clinging to his knees, then delved into the deep affection he held for her. He wrote this poem three years after parting ways with his daughter. Every scene from their daily lives evoked Yu Qian's profound longing and tenderness for his daughter, whom he missed dearly. He successfully portrayed an affectionate image through expressions of longing and tenderness towards his daughter, as well as through his teachings, care, and concerns for his family.

Overall, this research sheds light on the rich tapestry of self-images depicted in Yu Qian's poetry, revealing his complex identity as a poet and individual. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Yu Qian's literary legacy and offer valuable insights into the cultural and historical context of his time.

Discussion

Based on the analysis of Yu Qian's 623 poems, this paper summarizes the types of self-image reflected in his poetry. Four aspects of self-images are identified: the external image, the spiritual image, the social image, and the family image. Most people are familiar with Yu Qian's external image as a brave general and a leisurely literati (Qian, 2006; He, 2006; Li, 2010; Li, 2011). This study reveals his other sides as a traveler, poet, son, husband, and father, which have not been analyzed in past studies about Yu Qian (Jiang, 2001; Lin, 2007; Qian & Shi, 2011).

He would occasionally be moved by scenes, and in his old age, he also felt lonely. Yu Qian's self-image of possessing noble character and unquestionable integrity is widely known (Lü, 1995; Qian & Xiang, 2008; Yan, 2019). However, the author discovers the less-known images of him as optimistic and open-minded, vigorous and unrestrained, nostalgic, and with lofty ambitions. Previous studies have discussed Yu Qian's social image as an upright and incorruptible official (Chen, 2007; Qian & Shi, 2011). The author further explores his image as a person with deep affection and sincerity. The author also provides a detailed analysis of Yu Qian's family image, which reveals different aspects of his self-image when it comes to mentioning family and loved ones. To his elderly parents, he is a filial son, but due to official duties, he could not fully fulfill his filial obligations, leaving him filled with guilt. Despite being separated from his virtuous wife for long periods, he remained a devoted husband. As a father, he was affectionate towards his children. However, the heavy responsibilities on his shoulders prevented him from fulfilling his paternal duties like ordinary fathers do. This finding was not mentioned in previous studies.

The various self-images depicted by Yu Qian in his poetry align with psychologist Bonaro W. Overstreet's relevant theories on self-image and validate the definition of self-image. It also supports the overall subjective self-perception, encompassing one's physical appearance as well as impressions of one's personality, abilities, and so forth (Bailey, 2003).

It is a fine tradition in Chinese poetry to express one's aspirations. Yu Qian's poems reflect the real life of society at that time, while also expressing the thoughts and feelings of the poet. As one of the most outstanding poets of the early Ming Dynasty, Yu Qian's poetic achievements cannot be ignored. His upright character and rich poetic works have had a profound impact on later generations. Moreover, his poetry also reflects his lofty aspirations, patriotism, and love for the people. One poem in particular, "Song of the Lime", has been passed down through generations and included in Chinese primary school textbooks (Wen, 2019: 56). This poem embodies the noble sentiments and tenacious character of the poet, becoming a vivid portrayal and glorious example of Yu Qian and his spirit of sacrificing one's life for righteousness.

Conclusion

This paper explores the various types of self-images depicted in 623 poems from The Collected Works of Yu Qian. These self-images encompass external, spiritual, social, and family aspects. The analysis reveals that Yu Qian's writings predominantly center around spiritual and external self-images, while giving comparatively less attention to social and family self-images. However, all these self-image types underscore the ideal attributes possessed and the principles and values upheld by Yu Qian, who undertook multiple roles throughout his life, including that of a general, traveler, literati, poet, official, son, husband, and father.

Specifically, the researcher has come to comprehend that the self-images presented by Yu Qian in his poetry are both universal and diverse, varying depending on different periods, environments, and states of mind. There is a presence of the poet's "me" in Yu Qian's poetry, where his self-image can be that of an ambitious young man or that of an elderly poet whose spirit remains youthful despite aging. He can also be both a court official deeply concerned about the country and its people and a traveler who misses his hometown and family. Yu Qian can be seen as a brave general defending his country, as well as a devoted husband deeply in love with his wife. Thus, different kinds of self-image were reflected in Yu Qian's poetry. This paper makes a worthwhile contribution to the study of self-image in Yu Qian's poetry. The overall findings of this research are presented in Figure 7 as a mind map.

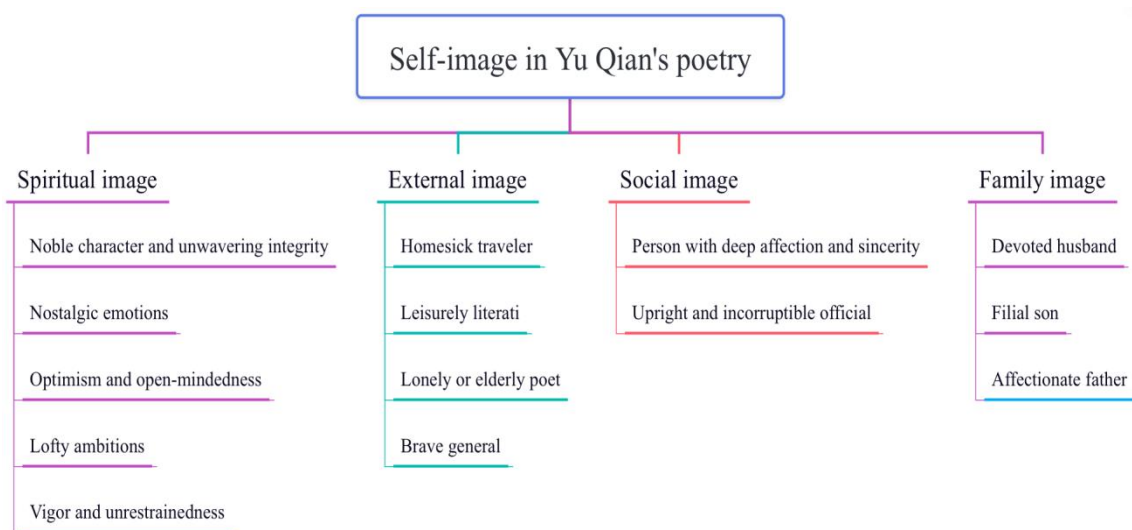


Figure 7 Mind Map of the overall findings

Recommendations

This paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the types of self-image in Yu Qian's poetry. It is recommended that further analysis and exploration of Yu Qian's literary works be undertaken.

Firstly, out of the existing 623 poems by Yu Qian, many cover different seasons of the year. Therefore, future research on Yu Qian's poetry could categorize and analyze his poems based on the themes of the four seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. This approach can provide a deeper understanding of the true significance of Yu Qian's poetry composition

across different seasonal backgrounds.

Secondly, Yu Qian's poetry includes numerous natural elements such as the moon, rain, rivers, flowers, wine, and wheat, among others. Future research on Yu Qian's poetry can also focus on the imagery present in his poems.

Thirdly, Yu Qian lived through the reigns of multiple emperors. His status and official positions varied under the rule of different emperors. Therefore, future research on Yu Qian's poetry can study and classify the poems written under the different reigns.

References

- Ayduk, O., Gyurak, A., & Luerssen, A. (2009) Rejection Sensitivity Moderates the Impact of Rejection on Self-Concept Clarity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 35 (11), 1467 – 1478.
- Bailey 2nd, J. A. (2003). Self-image, self-concept, and self-identity revisited. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 95 (5), 383.
- Bandura, A. (1978). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Advances in behaviour research and therapy*, 1 (4), 139-161.
- Beattie, S., Hardy, L., & Woodman, T. (2004). Precompetition self-confidence: The role of the self. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 26 (3), 427-441.
- Chen, S. F. (2006). The Tragedy of Disorderly Institutions and Perfect Ideals: Revisiting the Tragedy of Yu Qian. *Journal of the Communist Party School of Hangzhou Municipal Committee*. (6)
- Chen X. W. (2004). Regarding the Historical Positioning and Other Aspects of Yu Qian. *Zhejiang Academic Journal*, (6), 179-182.
- Chen, Z. P. (2007). *Patriotic and Incorruptible Official Yu Qian*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House.
- Covington, M. V. (1984). The self-worth theory of achievement motivation: findings and implications. *The elementary school journal*, 85 (1), 5-20. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu>
- Du, X. T. (2005). Discuss the Historical Necessity of Yu Qian's Transformation between Honor and Disgrace. *Journal of Henan Mechanical and Electrical Higher Vocational College*, 13 (4), 102-103.
- Elaine, P. C., Ruthstrauss, G., & Yin Shaochun. (1992). *Art: Another Language for Learning*. Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House.
- Gnambs, T., Scharl, A., & Schroeders, U. (2018). The Structure of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: A Cross-Cultural Meta-Analysis. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 226, 14–29.
- Gu, Y. T. (1977). *The Major Events of Ming History*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- He, F. X. (2006). The "Taihang Plot" in Yu Qian's Landscape Poetry. *Appreciation of Masterpieces: Literary Studies (Second Half of the Month)*, (6), 28-30.
- He, L. (2011). *A Study of Yu Qian's Literature* (Master's thesis, Hangzhou Normal University).
- Huang, S. S. (2004). Examining the Relationship Between Confucian Tradition and Monarchical Despotism Through the Tragedy of Yu Qian. *Journal of the Communist Party School of Hangzhou Municipal Committee*. 2.
- Jiang, Z. Y. (2001). A Brief Discussion on Yu Qian's Spirit of "Concern for the Country over Personal Gain" and "Concern for the Country over Family". *Guangdong Social Sciences*. 4.

- Kaur, J., Rana, J. S., & Kaur, R. (2009). Home environment and academic achievement as correlates of self-concept among adolescents. *Studies on Home and Community Science*, 3 (1), 13-17.
- Li, B. (2010). *The Prime Minister Who Saved the Dynasty: Yu Qian*. Beijing: China Legal Publishing House.
- Li, J. G. (2010). An Analysis of the Inevitability of the Tragedy of Yu Qian. *Journal of Shaanxi Institute of Education*, 26 (1), 87-90.
- Li, W. S. (2011). Yu Qian's Taihang Mountain Poetry. *Journal of Wenshan University*, 24 (2), 54-57.
- Li, Y. B. (2022). *Study of "The Collected Works of Yu Zhongsu"* (Master's thesis, Heilongjiang University).
- Lin, L. B. (2007). A Brief Discussion to Yu Qian's Thought. *Cultural and educational materials*, (10), 88-90.
- Lin, L. B. (2007). *Study on Yu Qian's Poetry* (Master's thesis, Southeast University).
- Lü, L. Z. (1995). Observe Yu Qian's noble character and high integrity in his poetry. *Journal of Jiangsu Open University*, 6 (4), 22-26.
- Ma, L. W. (2008). *Research on Description Bamboo Poetry of Tang Dynasty* (Master's thesis, Nanjing Normal University).
- Niu, J. Q. (2007). Crisis and Adaptation: Yu Qian and the Local Society of Henan in the 1430s and 1440s. Selected Works of Hangzhou Yu Qian Research Society. *Study on Yu Qian: Volume Four* (pp.13-54). Hangzhou: Hangzhou Publishing House.
- Niu, J. Q. (2008). Yu Qian and the Local Society of Henan between the Ming Xuande and Zhengtong Eras. *The Yellow River Civilization and Sustainable Development*. (1), 91-113.
- Ormrod, J. E., Anderman, E. M., & Anderman, L. H. (2023). *Educational psychology: Developing learners*. Pearson. One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458.
- Qian, G. L. (2006). *Feng Shu Yu Gao--Yu Qian Zhuan*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House.
- Qian, G. L., & Shi, W. (2011). Yu Qian's People-Oriented Ideology and Practice in the Provinces of Shanxi and Henan—With Poetry and Prose as Evidence. *Journal of Zhejiang University of Technology: Social Sciences Edition*, 10 (4), 361-366.
- Qian, G. L., & Xiang, C. Y. (2008). Yu Qian and the Humanistic Tradition of Zhejiang. *Journal of Zhejiang University of Technology (Social Sciences Edition)*. 1.
- Qian, G. L., & Xiang, W. H. (1999). Research on Yu Qian's Poetry. *Journal of Zhejiang Radio and Television College*, (2), 39-41.
- Qian, G. L., & Ye, R. M. (2009). Analyzing the Causes of Yu Qian's Life Tragedy from the Perspective of His Interpersonal Relationships. *Journal of Zhejiang University of Technology: Social Sciences Edition*, (3), 247-252.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton: Princeton university press.
- Sun, G. L. (1999). *The Complete Biography of Yu Shaobao*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House.
- Wang, S. H. (2006). The Death of Yu Qian and the Re-allocation of Central Power during the Jingtai Era. *Northern Forum*, (3), 86-89.

- Wei, T. L. (2007). The Historical Status of Yu Qian. *Zhejiang Academic Journal*, (2), 112-118.
- Wen, R. M. (2019). *Chinese Language · Grade Six, Volume Two*. Beijing: People's Education Press.
- Xu, T. L. (2005). Yu Qian's Personality, Poetic Style, and His Position in Poetry History. *Classical Literature Knowledge*, (5), 122-127.
- Xu, Y. C. (2023). *Xu Yuanchong's Translation of Selected Poems by Wang Wei*. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing House.
- Yahaya, A., & Ramli, J. (2009). The relationship between self-concept and communication skills towards academic achievement among secondary school students in Johor Bahru. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, 1 (2), 25.
- Yan, C. N. (2000). Reaserch on Yu Qian. *Journal of the Palace Museum*, (1), 51.
- Yan, C. N. (2019). *Yu Qian*. Beijing: Beijing People's Publishing House.
- Yu, Q. (2015). *The Collected Works of Yu Qian*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House.
- Zhang, M. F. (2002). The Defense of Beijing by Yu Qian and its historical significance. *Journal of Beijing Union University*, 16 (2), 30-33.
- Zhang, T. Y. (1974). *History of the Ming Dynasty*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Zhang, T. Y. (2011). *History of the Ming Dynasty: Third*. Beijing: Modern Education Press.
- Zhao, X. L. (2011). The Operation of Central Power During the Ming Yingzong and Ming Jingdi Period from Yu Qian's Death. *Sanxia Forum*, (3), 86-89.
- Zhao, Y. (2018). Yu Qian's "Lime Spirit" by Refusing to Leave Wealth and Status to His Family. *In and Out of the Classroom (Essay Solo)*.
- Zhu, Z. F. (2012). A Brief Analysis of the Causes of Yu Qian's Death. *Journal of Mudanjiang University*, 21 (1), 64-65.