

A Textual Research on “Kudzu” in the Book of Songs

He ZHU^a, Hongyong Zhang^{b,*}

College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Yunnan Agricultural University, Kunming, China

^a2399388863@qq.com, ^b535250550@qq.com

*corresponding author

Keywords: The book of songs, “kudzu”, Agricultural culture

Abstract: This paper, by cataloguing the words of “Kudzu” and its combination in The Book of Songs, carries out knowledge archaeology by comparing its contexts, and finds that the word “Kudzu” has different cultural meanings besides its original meaning, which can be regarded as the different customs of agricultural culture and society reflected in the era of “Poetry” and the implication of agricultural culture. Today, “Kudzu” is still a very important food material or medicinal material, and its function is not only related to the era of “Poetry” and but also has new development. Through the investigation of “Kudzu”, we can get a glimpse of the agricultural society, history and culture in the Era of “Poetry”.

1. Introduction

To a certain extent, The Book of Songs is a mirror of social life at that time. From the perspective of life, it truly reflects the phenomenon of social life in the Western Zhou Dynasty, and also shows the extremely rich and delicate thoughts and emotions of the Western Zhou people. In the Book of Songs, descriptions of various animals and plants and natural landscapes are often used to express the hero's complex feelings about something or some objects. According to statistics, in all chapters of the Book of Songs, “Kudzu” is the most frequently mentioned economic crop except “Hemp”. Ten articles are written about “Kudzu”, among which five articles are directly named after “Kudzu”, and the word “Kudzu Vine” appears in three articles for 7 times, totaling 16 times. Among these chapters, the most famous one is “Kudzu vines spread, across the valley, leafy and lush;” in Kudzu Vine, Odes Of Zhou And The South; another example is “To gather kudzu vine goes she, I miss her whom I cannot see, One day seems longer than months three;”, which is also the source of allusions that “Missing you one day is like being separated for three autumns”.

The so-called “Kudzu” is a perennial herbaceous twining vine with purple flowers and stems two or three feet long, and it can be woven into baskets and ropes, its fibers for weaving, and its roots for food. It can be used for extraction of starch, as well as for pharmacy.

The article aims to probe into the combination of the agricultural social culture in the Western Zhou Dynasty with the use of “Kudzu” and related agricultural social and cultural phenomena at present, so as to elaborate the development of agricultural social history and culture.

2. The “Kudzu” in the Era of “Poetry”

2.1 The “Kudzu” as an Object of Labor

In the Book of Songs, “Kudzu” first appeared as an object of labor, or as an object of productive labor, and “Kudzu” occupied a large part of the agricultural social life in the Era of “Poetry”.

Because of its extremely high utilization value, “Kudzu” has always been favored by people. Zhou people wrote it into poetry, describing its growth and production process, thus expressing the mood of poetry heroes. For example, in Kudzu Vine, Odes Of Zhou And The South, it mentions that “Kudzu vines spread, across the valley, leafy and lush;”, which describes the growing environment and form of “Kudzu” in detail. Another example is “I cut it and I boiled it, And made both fine cloth and coarse, Which I will wear without getting tired of it.”, which depicts the heroine of poetry, that

is, how a woman cut, boiled, wove coarse and fine kudzu cloth, and finally sewed and made clothes. The reappearance of this labor process reflects to some extent how Zhou people used “Kudzu” in the agricultural production process, and reflects the original relationship between people and this plant.

In addition to Kudzu Vine, Odes Of Zhou And The South, there is also a poem named directly after “Kudzu”, that is, Kudzu Shoes, Odes Of Wei. From the title of “Kudzu Shoes”, this poem indicates that “Kudzu” is used to make shoes by people, and the sentence “Tightly woven kudzu shoes could be used to walk on frost.” depicts how the maid fabricated the kudzu shoes. And the first poem of this chapter is “Tightly woven kudzu shoes could be used to walk on frost. Delicate, the woman's hands, with them she could sew a shirt. She makes a waist and a collar for it, the good man wears it.”, which described the maid's labor process, demonstrating the whole process of how the maid fabricated kudzu shoes, wove kudzu cloth and made kudzu clothing.

From the above two poems, it can be known that “Kudzu” appeared in all aspects of life in the agricultural society in the Era of “Poetry”, and it was also the first to appear in poetry as a laboring object or production object among many plants and flowers, and most of them appeared from their uses, that is, they focused on the use of “Kudzu” in agricultural production and life. Thus, it can be seen that the natural plants or laboring objects mentioned by Zhou people in their poetry creation are closely related to their production and life.

2.2 The “Kudzu” for Making Fabrics

“Kudzu” has been mentioned in the Book of Songs for many times as clothing and shoes. For example, in Kudzu Vine, Odes Of Zhou And The South, it is mentioned that “I cut it and i boiled it, and made both ‘Chi’ and ‘Xi’”, in which “Chi” and “Xi” refer to fine kudzu cloth and coarse kudzu cloth respectively; Another example is that “Kudzu” was used to make shoes in “Tightly woven kudzu shoes could be used to walk on frost.” of Kudzu Shoes, Odes Of Wei. and “Five pairs of kudzu shoes are laid side by side, The hat ribbons are made to match each other.” of South Mountain, Odes Of Qi. This kind of shoes are strong, light and durable, so that they can “be used to walk on frost”.

When it comes to “Kudzu”, most people think of kudzu root powder which is often eaten in summer. In fact, “Kudzu” was used to make fabrics more commonly in ancient times. According to the investigation, the cultivation history of “Kudzu” can be traced back to Yao, Shun and Yu periods. As far back as that time, people were using kudzu vine to extract fibers to make fabrics. In 1972, three pieces of “Kudzu” cloth fragments originated from the Neolithic Age were excavated in Caoxie Mountain, Wuxian County (present-day Wuzhong District of Suzhou City), Jiangsu Province, which can support this statement. After being identified by Shanghai Textile Institute, these three fragments were exquisite jacquard rib “Kudzu” cloth. It can be seen that in the Neolithic Age, people had been very good at using “kudzu” to make clothing.

In the Era of “Poetry”, that is, in the Zhou Dynasty, the imperial court set up a post of “Kudzu Officer” in the central government, which was mainly responsible for collecting and controlling the textile raw materials of “Kudzu” and hemp, and made a distinction between “Kudzu of Mountain Farmers” (for weaving kudzu cloth) and “Kudzu of Marsh Farmers” (for food). In addition, in the pre-Qin period, Tribute of Yu, The Book of History mentioned that “Its articles of tribute were salt, Chi, productions of the sea of various kinds”; The Explanation and Study of Principles of Composition of Characters mentioned that “Chi means fine kudzu cloth”, and Xiao Erya interpreted that “Fine kudzu cloth is called Chi”, where Chi refers to the fine cloth. made of “Kudzu” fiber. In this way, in combination with the chapters mentioned in The Book of Songs, the main use of “Kudzu” in ancient times was that its fiber could be used for making clothing and shoes.

2.3 The Emergence of “Kudzu” as an “Image”

The above two points are all discussed from the practical function of “Kudzu”, but the creation of The Book of Songs mainly reflected the state of Zhou people's agricultural social life, thus

expressing some emotions and ideas. In this period, people's cognition of "Kudzu" removed its practical function, and some connotations were entrusted with special customs and ideology, which were collectively reflected in some chapters of The Book of Songs.

Zhu Xi once said: "Metaphor means using the noumena to reflect the parabolic objects." "Kudzu" is the so-called "noumena" in these chapters of the Book of Songs, and the "parabolic object" is to reflect some social customs and life phenomena of Zhou people. The sentence "Tightly woven kudzu shoes could be used to walk on frost." has appeared in two chapters, namely Eastern Powers, Minor Odes of the Kingdom and Kudzu Shoes, Odes of Wei. The former describes the empty loom and the looted "Kudzu" shoes, which were used to describe the evil exploitation of the Zhou royal family, while the latter describes the maid who worked hard to make "Kudzu" shoes and sew new clothes for the ladies, but they were abused and dissatisfied, reflecting the social reality of distinct social classes and much difference between the rich and the poor. Although the social realities reflected in the two poems are different, the emergence of "Kudzu" image is very ironic.

Regarding the main theme of the poem Kudzu Vine, Odes Of Zhou And The South, after consulting from multiple literatures, it was found that the ancient people tended to cherish it as one of the classical works in morality function, but now more people regard it as a poem about the laboring people. This poem mainly depicts a picture of a woman who was waiting to return home, in which it mentions about her process of picking kudzu vine, scalding, and weaving to make new clothes before taking leave from a female supervisor. From this, it is speculated whether there was a custom to wear clothes made of kudzu when she paid a visit to her parents? However, after consulting from a large number of literatures, there is no accurate statement or data to support this conjecture. However, a series of laboring processes depicted in the poem, such as picking "Kudzu", scalding, weaving and making clothes, conveyed the joy that the heroine was about to return home, and at the same time show the diligence and competence of women, which is beyond doubt.

"Kudzu" is also mentioned in Trees with Curved Drooping Branches, Odes Of Zhou And The South, but here "Kudzu" and "Vine" are used together as "Kudzu Vine". Sun Xiuhua listed three different interpretations of "Kudzu" in "Textual Research on 'Kudzu' in The Book of Songs", which is understood here as twining vine plant without unnecessary details. The poem says: "In the south are trees with curved drooping branches, With the kudzu vines clinging to them... In the south are the trees with curved drooping branches, Covered by the kudzu vines... In the south are the trees with curved drooping branches, Round which the kudzu vines twine." The "Kudzu Vines" entangled with trees is used to describe a woman marrying a man. The interdependence between the "Kudzu Vines" and the "Tree with Curved Drooping Branches" describes the happiness of the newlyweds, praying for the bridegroom's blessings, which also uses reiterative sentence to express emotions. This poem reflects the simple and ancient wedding blessing custom in the Era of "Poetry".

The poem Kudzu Grows, Odes of Tang is directly named after "Kudzu", and the poem referring to "Kudzu" is written as follows: "Vine grows over thorn tree; Weeds in field overspread. Thou whom I love art dead. Who'd dwell with lonely thee?" It can be seen that this is a poem in which a wife mourns her late husband, and the five sections all use the technique of reduplicative sentences to render emotions and express endless thoughts and mourning. The first two sentences of this poem depict a desolate scene of kudzu vines entwining thorns in the wild, and white stalks were all over the wilderness. At this time, "Kudzu" became the incarnation of the woman who lost her husband in the Zhou Dynasty. Due to the war, there were as many women who lost their husbands as there were kudzu grass overgrown. It can be seen that Zhou people are good at comparing people with plants that are closely related to agricultural production and life in poetry creation to express sadness or joy. Complex emotions are also due to this. The creation of The Book of Songs is full of breath of life. Therefore, it is believed that the agricultural social and cultural life in the Era of "Poetry" is just as simple, real and full of interest as described in The Book of Songs.

3. The Development of "Kudzu" in Agricultural Social Life from Ancient Times Till Today

3.1 The Planting and Use of “Kudzu”

3.1.1 “Kudzu” Planting Industry in History

Historically, people have used “Kudzu” in a variety of ways. After consulting from the literatures, there are roughly the following kinds:

Kudzu was planted on a large scale as food. “Guide to Defense against the Miao” mentioned that “There are many small white bamboo clusters beside the stones of (Miaojiang) stream, and the terrain of kudzu field is deeply dangerous.” This description reflects the status of “Kudzu” as a food crop at that time, rather than as a wild plant. At that time, Miao people ate “Kudzu” and planted it in large areas.

Kudzu root powder was included into one of the tribute items of the imperial court. As recorded in General Annals of Guizhou written in Qianlong Period, “Kudzu is planted in Anlong Prefecture (present-day Anlong County), all over the mountains and plains, and its root can be processed into edible powder.”; in Guide to Defense against the Miao written in Jiaqing Period, “People entered the mountain to harvest fiddlehead and kudzu root, processed them into edible powder, and returned home at the spring-ploughing time.”; in Gazetteer of Zunyi Prefecture (Continued), “In Yuanhe Period of Tang Dynasty, Yizhou (present-day Zunyi)” paid tribute of 15 kilograms of kudzu root powder.” Therefore, it can be known that, as early as Tang Dynasty, kudzu root powder had been the articles of tribute to the imperial court as an important crop, which made the planting industry of kudzu more and more prosperous.

3.1.2 Processing and Derivation of Kudzu Root Powder as Food and Medicine.

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, it has been recorded that kudzu was eaten as a vegetable, which was stated in Materia Medica for Dietotherapy: “Eating kudzu after steamed, it can dispel the effects of alcohol. Its powder also has very wonderful efficacy.”; Li Shizhen's Compendium of Materia Medica systematically explains the medicinal properties of kudzu root: quenching thirst, relieving summer heat and detoxifying; Zhang Zhongjing's Treatise on Febrile Diseases also contains the prescription of “Kudzu”; The nature, taste and efficacy of kudzu root were recorded in The Holy Husbandman's Classic on Roots and Herbs in detail, which was recorded as medium-grade drug.

From the above, it can be seen that “Kudzu” existed as an important role in agricultural society in history. Whether it is for making clothes, or as food or medicine, “Kudzu” filled ancient people's lives, and its role should not be underestimated.

3.1.3 Modern “Kudzu” Planting Industry

Nowadays, Kudzu the plant still appears in people's life, but its use for making shoes and clothes has gradually disappeared. However, its edible and medicinal value is still very great, such as eating kudzu root powder to relieve summer heat in summer, or eating kudzu root powder to strengthen stomach, digest food, or reduce internal heat. And now, kudzu root has become a medicine and food homologous plant approved by the Ministry of Health of China, which has both medicinal value and health care effect.

Because the growth habit of kudzu is very adaptable, it is almost all over China except Xinjiang, Tibet and other alpine regions.

In today's agricultural production, after continuous research and development, many new derivatives about kudzu have been produced, including kudzu cake, kudzu noodles and so on; There are also drinks, such as energy drinks and kudzu-root tea; There is also the development of health products; In addition, kudzu feedstuffs have been developed, which is suitable for raising horses, pigs and rabbits.

3.2 “Kudzu” and Agricultural Social and Cultural Life in Ancient Times

In Zhao Shuhong's "Study on the Evolution Mechanism of the Rites and Customs of Picking 'Kudzu'", the sections of Kudzu Vine, The Book of Songs are regarded as labor ballads sung by farmers when they were working, and the pursuit of etiquette and customs of women who pick "Kudzu" is put forward. It is believed that these ballads make women's labor show a strong sense of rhythm and experience. The article holds that mentioning "Kudzu" in poetry and restoring a series of labor processes such as picking "Kudzu" are an important manifestation of the close connection between ancient agricultural society, culture and life, which also reflects the unsophistication and honesty of laboring people to some extent.

In Shi Youming's "A Look at the Agricultural Social Life and People's Nature in the Middle and Lower Reaches of the Yellow River from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the Middle of the Spring and Autumn Period", he concluded that the Book of Songs reflected the life of farmers in this period, such as collective labor life, main crops planting, farming techniques, and different living conditions at different levels. When the main crops are mentioned in the article, two kinds are highlighted, among which "Kudzu" is one. It can be seen from this that "Kudzu" does appear more frequently than others in The Book of Songs. Shi Youming also said that the Book of Songs showed the honesty and introversion of national nature, which could be reflected from the various work scenes depicted in it; in a similar way, this statement is equally applicable when the scope is narrowed down to the sections about "Kudzu". From this, we can realize that both "Kudzu" and other crops are permeated with mellow emotions in the life of farmers in the Era of "Poetry", and farmers turned this into words and poems which filled their social culture.

There are still many literatures about this kind of writing, which cannot be enumerated here, but from the above point of view, it is not difficult to draw the following conclusion: in the Era of "Poetry", the Zhou people put all kinds of plants, flowers and grasses into poetry, which was embodied as "Kudzu" in the Book of songs. "Kudzu", as the main crop at that time, was picked, boiled or used for sewing cloths, all of which were the most daily work scene of the working people at the bottom at that time. It not only embodied the local customs at that time, but also contained the complex feelings and simplicity of the working people, which might be regarded as a part of Kudzu's reflections in people's agricultural social and cultural life.

Modern "Kudzu" and agricultural social and cultural Life. In modern society, "Kudzu" seems to permeate people's daily life more in terms of food and medicine, and its relationship with modern agricultural society and culture is far less than that of the Era of "Poetry". However, those ancient poems are still widely circulated today, and they are also an important historical material for archaeologists in agricultural archaeology.

4. Conclusion

In the Era of "Poetry", "Kudzu", as an important part of agricultural social life, provided people with food and clothing. Its relevant laboring process was integrated into poetry by Zhou people, which was used as a metaphor for social environment and people themselves, reflecting the great correlation between "Kudzu" and agricultural social life. Poetry with its creative inspiration and background was widely circulated, reflecting both the folk customs of the times and the complex emotions of Zhou people, providing excellent materials for agricultural social culture at that time.

References

- [1] Zhang Dechun. "Kudzu". Chinese Vegetables, no.7, pp.65, 2015.
- [2] Ke Xiaogang. Leisure and perfection of life: Interpretation of Kudzu Vine and In the Forest of the Mulberry in the Book of Songs. Journal of Southwest University of Political Science and Law, vol.19, no.4, pp.3-8, 2017.
- [3] Wu Hexian. On contemporary innovative utilization of important agricultural cultural heritage. Chinese Agricultural History, vol.37, no.1, pp.115-130, 2018.

- [4] Feng Hong. Viewing the farming activities of Zhou ancestors from The Book of Songs. Academic Exchange, no.5, pp.157-160, 2005.
- [5] Wang Zheng. The entanglement of plants in The Book of Songs: Aesthetic metaphor and literary anthropological significance. Agricultural Archaeology, no.4, pp.165-180, 2011.
- [6] Shi Youming. A look at the agricultural social life and people's nature in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the middle of the Spring and Autumn Period. Agricultural Archeology, no.1, pp.110-119, 2008.
- [7] Zhao Shuhong. Study on the evolution mechanism of the rites and customs of picking 'Kudzu'" in The Book of Songs -- Also on the evolution of folk customs from western myth to The Book of Songs. Lanzhou Academic Journal, no.8, pp.27-32, 2014.
- [8] Yao Xiao'ou, An Dajian. Explanation of the word "Huo" in Kudzu Vine. The Book of Songs. Academic Journal of Zhongzhou, no.2, pp.136-139, 2018.
- [9] Liu Yuqing. Interpretation of Trees with Curved Drooping Branches, Odes Of Zhou And The South, The Book of Songs. Appreciation of Famous Works, no.1, pp.30-35, 2018.
- [10] Sun Xiuhua, Liao Qun. Textual research on "Kudzu Vine" in The Book of Songs. Chuanshan Academic Journal, no.3, pp.76-78, 2011.
- [11] Luo Qiong, Hao Jinda, Yang Hua, et al. Herbalogical study on kudzu root. Chinese Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine, no.12, pp.1141-1144, 2007.
- [12] Xue Jing. Brief Discussion on "Kudzu" in The Book of Songs. Journal of Southeast Guizhou Normal College for Nationalities, no.4, pp.102-104, 2006.
- [13] Chao Fulin. Viewing the rites and customs of Zhou Dynasty reflected in Kudzu Vine, The Book of Songs from On Poetry in Bamboo Slips in Shanghai Museum. Study and Exploration, no.5, pp.43-49+5, 2005.