

## Four Chinese Great Beauties and Chinese Aesthetics

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### Abstract:

This article clarifies three criteria for becoming the Four Great Beauties. First, all these beauties lived in special times while their motherlands were facing big threats or challenges. Second, they were all tragic characters. Third, their sacrifices were devoted to their motherlands, even the sacrifices were the important factors to save their motherlands from be destroyed. They were always tragic characters. Chinese people sympathize with them in their misfortune and could not forget their contributions.

Keywords: Four Great Beauties, Xi Shi, Wang Zhaojun, Diao Chan, Lady Yang

### 1. Introduction

China is one of the largest countries in the world. There were countless beauties in the very long Chinese history. Why Xi Shi, Wang Zhaojun, Diao Chan and Lady Yang have been recognized and honored as the Four Great Beauties in China<sup>[1]</sup>? This should be seen from the perspective of Chinese Aesthetics.

Needlessly to say these four ladies were beautiful, but no one could deny Su Daji was very beautiful. She was the first beautiful lady written recorded in Chinese. It was said she was lovely enough to cause the fall of a city or a state<sup>[2]</sup>. Most of Chinese, including scholars and ordinary persons, believed she was an extraordinary fox who had 9 tails that means it was the strongest one. Chinese believe that a fox with 9 tails always has special power. It could show to people a most beautiful appearance and

known for its smarts. Su Daji was queen of King Zhou of Shang Dynasty. The Shang Dynasty (1600 BC - 1046 BC) was the first dynasty with direct written records of the same period in China. She always seduced King Zhou to do all kind of bad things, such as built a pond filled with wine and many stacks of meat like wood , indiscriminate slaughtered of countless innocent victims, started war after war, recruited a large number of migrant workers, and so on. In Chinese history she has been sentenced as the chief culprit who caused the Shang dynasty been overthrown. What she brought to nation and persons were great disasters and endless painful memories.

Bao Si was another beauty who was equally famous with Su Daji. She was the Queen of the King You of West Zhou Dynasty. The Zhou dynasty was established after the fall of the Shang Dynasty. The Zhou Dynasty was divided into two periods, the Western Zhou (mid-11th century-771 BC) and the Eastern Zhou (770-256 BC). King You signed an agreement with some feudatory kings that these kings must come to protect the capital of Zhou dynasty while they see smokes from smoke towers. It was hard to get Bao Si to smile. At last the King got an idea. He ordered to lit the beacon towers. When these feudatory kings found that King You was kidding they were all very angry. After a while, when the enemy does attack King You lit the beacon towers again and no response came from them. The drama made directly the Western Zhou dynasty collapsed immediately<sup>[3]</sup>. The price of her smile is the end of nations and the death of millions.

These two ladies have not been selected and been listed among the Four Great Beauties.

Luo Fu was a most beautiful girl. One day she worked in mulberry bush, as soon as met her all people forgot who they were and what they were doing. They were fascinated by her and talked her each other all day long<sup>[4]</sup>. Even so, she has not been considered among the Four Great Beauties.

Zhao Feiyan was a slim beautiful empress lived in Han dynasty (202 BC-220 AD). The most famous story told that she could dance in a palm<sup>[5]</sup>. In fact, Feiyan in Chinese means a flying swallow. Great poet Li Bai of Tang dynasty wrote a poem: Zhao Feiyan was slim and Lady Yang was plump, nobody could tell which one was more beautiful<sup>[6]</sup>. As everyone knows that Zhao Feiyan was also not among the Four Great Beauties.

What is the secluded Chinese Aesthetics concerning the Great Beauties? How did Chinese use it to develop the criteria to decide who should be the Four Great Beauties? First, all these beauties lived in special times while their motherlands were facing big threats or challenges. Second, they were all tragic characters. Third, their sacrifices were devoted to their motherlands, even the sacrifices were the important factors to save their motherlands from be destroyed. Let's check it to look whether all the four ladies meet the criteria.

## 2. Xi Shi

Xi Shi was lived in a small mountain village and her motherland was Yue State located in today's Zhejiang Province about 500 BC. Everyday Xi Shi washed silk in

a small river. Zhuang Zi(369BC-286BC), a famous Chinese philosopher said that she was so beautiful that all fishes shocked to fall to bottom of the river. That was wartime. Yue State had been defeated by Wu State and the King Goujian of Yue State had been captured to Wu State. King Goujian Served King Fuchai of Wu State as a loyal slave and got trust of King Fuchai. Several years later King Goujian be released and went back to his motherland. What he saw had shocked him, scenes of devastation met the eye everywhere and the severe shrink population. He vowed to avenge. As part of his plan he hunted a beauty, Xi Shi, and trained her as a spy. King Gojian send Xi Shi to Wu State to be the Queen of King Fuchai. King Fuchai loved her and built splendid buildings for her. Xi Shi convinced King Fuchai that he need not pay attention to Yue State and encouraged him to strive for hegemony in mainland. Ten years later Yue State recovered from war and Wu State consumed power. Yue State attacked Wu State while King Fuchai was fighting with other powerful states. Yue State won the war and King Fuchai suicided<sup>[7]</sup>. Yue State occupied Wu State and became a powerful state. Nobody could tell where Xi Shi had gone to. All the people of Yue State missed her very much.

### 3. Wang Zhaojun

Wu Emperor of Han Dynasty was very impressive for his military accomplishments<sup>[8]</sup>. He spent several decades to defeat Hun, an ancient powerful nationality in Mongolia and north China. He consumed all money of national bank and all people became poor. Then he admitted his mistake to the whole country<sup>[9]</sup>. Decades later Zhao Emperor of Han Dynasty chosen a very beautiful girl Wang Zhaojun and sent her to the Hun to be the queen of the Khan<sup>[10]</sup>. Wang Zhaojun was so beautiful that when the wild geese which were flying in sky saw her they all fell to the grassland. The Khan loved Wang Zhaojun very much and they had several sons and daughters. One of their sons became the next Khan. From then the two countries kept peace for 80 years. Weather was cold and life was hard for her in Hun. What he experienced were all different from homeland. She missed her motherland and hometown, but she never forgot her mission. She had made her contribution to the two countries, she saved millions lives. Chinese kept her in mind indeed.

### 4. Diao Chan

Dong Zhuo was a most powerful and evil warlord of the last phase of Han dynasty. He overthrown Han dynasty, at the same time destroyed many cities and killed ten million of people<sup>[11]</sup>. The population dropped from 60 million to less than 10 million. Cao Cao, a great poet lived in the same period, wrote a poem said: even you walk for thousand miles what can you see are just bones, you cannot hear a single sing from a cock<sup>[12]</sup>. All peoples at that time, including high rank officers, warlords and ordinary persons, feared to face Dong Zhuo. They all hated Dong Zhuo but dare not to fight him, even if they all wanted him to be killed. At that movement Diao Chan, a young lady, who stood out and schemed to kill Dong <sup>[13]</sup>. Diao Chan was so beautiful that when she prayed to moon and moon was struck to hide inside clouds. Helped with many others, she performed perfectly and succeeded. She saved country and many

lives. After Dong Zhuo died there was no record concerning her whereabouts.

## 5. Lady Yang

The time China governed by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang Dynasty was considered the glorious age of Tang Dynasty<sup>[14]</sup>. There was a beautiful lady named as Lady Yang, who was the queen of the Emperor and the Emperor loved her very much<sup>[15]</sup>. It was told that when flowers saw Lady Yang they all felt regret to bloom. The emperor and Lady Yang made an oath that “in heaven let us be two birds flying ever together, and on earth two trees with branches interlocked forever”<sup>[16]</sup>. One of powerful marshals and trusted by the Emperor, An Lushan who led a rising and, the Emperor run away from capital<sup>[17]</sup>. On the way the army who guarded the Emperor refused to go any farther. They demanded to kill Lady Yang because they believed she was the “Helen of Troy”. She committed suicide before the army moved on again<sup>[18]</sup>. After several years the army loyal to the Tang Dynasty destroyed the rebel forces. From then the Tang Dynasty lasted for one hundred and more years. Chinese believed that Lady Yang was a scapegoat. They remembered with gratitude to Lady Yang and made some stories. Some stories told that Lady Yang had not suicided on the way of escape from capital. She was saved by Japanese and be sent to Japan. The great poet Bai Juyi agreed with this story and he wrote a long poem to commemorate her. The name of the poem was “a Song of Eternal Sorrow”<sup>[19]</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

Base on the above discussion we may find out that Chinese have their consideration to choose whom should be among the Four Great Beauties. We should understand that the beautiful appearance is of great importance, which is visible to all. What we must mind is that who has only beautiful appearance is not sufficient to be elected as one of the Four Great Beauties in Chinese history. They should have made big contribution to their motherland during the critical historical time, e.g. saved many life or peace for the country. They were always tragic characters. Xi Shi, Wang Zhaojun, Diao Chan and Lady Yang all meet these criteria. Chinese people sympathize with them in their misfortune and could not forget their contributions. Su Daji, Bao Si, Luo Fu and Zhao Feiyan do not meet these criteria.

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