

## Green 綠

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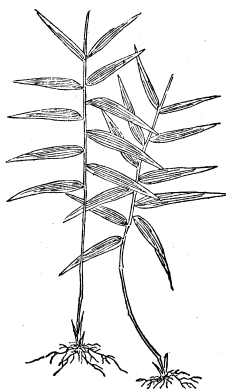
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The color word lǜ 綠 “green” (as distinct from the broad-spectrum chīng 青, which can denote anything from green to purple) occurs 10 times in 4 Shī poems. Samples from those poems (with Legge’s translations) are:

- 27A1-2 綠兮衣兮 Green is the upper robe,  
綠衣黃裏 Green with a yellow lining!
- 55A2 綠竹猗猗 With their green bamboos, so fresh and luxuriant!
- 55B2 綠竹青青 With their green bamboos, so strong and luxuriant!
- 226A1-2 終朝采綠 All the morning I gather the king-grass  
不盈一匊 And do not collect enough to fill my hands
- 226B1-2 終朝采藍 All the morning I gather the indigo plant  
不盈一擔 And do not collect enough to fill my apron
- 300E2 朱英綠縵 Red tassels, green lashings

“Green” works for 27A1-2 and 300E2; note the implication that both green and yellow dyes existed at this time. In Shī 55, bamboos are often green, but the affective 猗猗, implying sinuousness or grace, does not suit so stiff a plant. Máu reads 葦竹, construes it as two plants, and defines 葦 as wáng-chú 王芻 “king-grass.” But nowhere in the Shī are two things described by one affective; it is best to take the whole phrase 葦竹 as equal to 王芻. Among the synonyms given for this plant is jìn-tsǎu 葦草. The description of jìn-tsǎu which best fits the “coves of Chí” in Shī 55 is a bamboo-like aquatic grass, thought by some to have medicinal value.<sup>1</sup> Here is a picture of it:<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>The pre-Táng JDSW 61 makes it 5 to 6 span (about 4 feet) high.

<sup>2</sup>Wú 285.

That takes care of the larger of our two plants; the 綠竹 or 葦草. What about the presumably smaller 綠 of Shī 226? It parallels 藍 “indigo” in the next stanza, as gathered by a woman who is distracted by worry for an absent husband or betrothed. By parallel, which we may emphasize by writing 綠 as 葦, it should be a dye plant, preferably one giving a green color. The commentators, finding the color word 綠 unsuited to the line, have imported from Shī 55 the gloss 王芻, but as Legge notes, “for what purpose the lady would be gathering it, I do not know.” Nor do I: a handful of so large a plant could be gathered in seconds, making the Shī 226 line ridiculous. To make that poem work, we need a dye plant, and one harder to gather than indigo.

Morohashi 9/31152 describes 葦 as a plant whose stems and leaves yield a yellow (黃) dyestuff. “Yellow” is no problem: yellow as a topdye with indigo gives green,<sup>3</sup> and from Shī 226 itself, we know that the person described had indigo available.<sup>4</sup>

If something like this may be allowed we would have, for the Shī lines in question:

- 27A1-2 綠兮衣兮 Green is the upper robe,  
綠衣黃裏 Green with a yellow lining!
- 55A2 綠竹猗猗 With their king-grass, so graceful!
- 55B2 綠竹青青 With their king-grass, so verdant!
- 226A1-2 終朝采綠 All the morning I gather green<sup>5</sup>  
不盈一掬 And get no more than fills my hands
- 226B1-2 終朝采藍 All the morning I gather indigo  
不盈一襜 And get no more than fills my apron
- 300E2 朱英綠滕 Red tassels, green lashings

It seems to work.

**Conclusion.** What does this study in realia tell us? First, that the Shī commentators were sometimes more prone to divide phrases (such as 綠竹) than the situation warranted, and thus may have had too monosyllabic a perception of their language. Second, that they were capable of transferring a reasonable gloss like 王芻 from a place like Shī 55, where it works, to another like Shī 226, where it does not. That is, they they may have had too uniform a perception of their text. Third, that these learned gentlemen may not have been completely informed about the things and techniques which together make up the arcana of “women’s work.”

### Works Cited

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- Karen Diadick Casselman. *Lichen Dyes*. 1996; 2ed Dover 2001
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- Jenny Dean. *Wild Color*. 1999, rev Watson-Guptil 2010
- Wú Chí-jywn 吳其濬. *植物名實圖考*. 1848; 中華 1963

<sup>3</sup>Adrosko 107-109.

<sup>4</sup>Another way of tilting a yellow dye toward green is with a copper mordant: Dean 59, 62. Several lichen dyes (which are hard to gather) give a direct green; see Casselman 1 and 31-36.

<sup>5</sup>So Waley, who may have had it right from the beginning.