

The Influences of American Deep Image on the Third-Generation Poets in China*

YIN Gen-de

Jinggangshan University, Ji'an, Jiangxi 343009, China

The Third-Generation Poetry of China (namely Post-misty Poetry too) initiated with the introduction of Western modernist poetry, especially sorts of American Post-modernist poetry schools into China. "The relation between American poetry and Chinese poetry has a long history, which lies in the influences on the creation of the Third-Generation poets. This influence is probably unprecedented in its depth and breadth." "Irrational association" and "leaping images" proposed by American Deep Image poets influenced by Freudian and Jungian unconscious perception gained an extraordinary appreciation among the Third-Generation poets who were in pursuit constantly of the experiments on poetic form and language. This paper mainly discusses the influences of American Deep Image on the Third-Generation poets of China through a case study of WANG Yin and CHEN Dongdong's poems.

Keywords: The Third-Generation Poetry, Deep Image, influence, irrational association, leaping image

Introduction

The relation between American poetry and Chinese poetry has a long history, just as many American modernist and post-modernist poets were influenced by Chinese classical poetry, the rising and development of China's New Poetry also couldn't escape the impact of Western literary trends of thoughts and theories, especially American poets. A long list may be present, from Longfellow, Whitman, Dickenson, to T. S. Eliot, Pound, Plath, Lowell, Bernstein and Robert Bly. The Third-Generation poetry initiated with the introduction and translation of lots of Western literary concepts, thoughts, and modernist and post-modernist poetry into China in 1980s. American Confessional poetry and Deep Image poetry (New Surrealist poetry) privileged the influence on WANG Yin and CHEN Dongdong, important members of Maritime poem group.

In 1980s, Western modernist and post-modernist literary trends and works were introduced into China, and the Misty poetry represented by BEI Dao and SHU Ting gradually declined. Some of Misty poets and a number of young poets began to rethink and even revolt against the heroism, awareness of hardship and critical spirit in the Misty poetry. In their opinion, the Misty poetry was just a start in the exploration of Chinese modern poetry, which had no bounds of potential and possibility; however, at that time, that the circle of poets tended to

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YIN Gen-de, Professor of School of Foreign Languages at Jinggangshan University. His major field is American poetry.

classically the Misty poetry aroused a sense of anxiety in them. They were particularly concerned with a lack of awareness of text among contemporary poets' creation (they endowed the poetry with too much social ideology and social ethics spirit), and the potentials and possibility of Chinese words and expressions, they believed, had large rooms for exploration and experiments. As a result, it is inevitable that new poetry and new poets which differentiated from Misty poetry came into being as a rebellious attitude against Misty poetry. They took "passing Bei Dao" and "Down with Shu Ting" as their slogan, and launched a splendid poetic nationwide movement. Their creation career lasted until 1990s, and literary critics named them in different terms, such as, "Post-misty poetry", the Third-Generation poetry", or "Avant-garde poetry" from which more than ten poetry schools or poetry tribes derived, like "Maritime poem group", "The Holism", "Boorism", and "Feifeism", etc. The Third-Generation poets advocated revolutionary experiment, consequently, their poetry characterized by diversification under the banner of "experiment" and "innovation". "American poetry of 20th century, with its great contributions in theory and specific artistic ideas, is universally acknowledged by the Third-Generation poets, who combined with their creation practice, and transformed creatively into their writing" (JIAN, 2008, p. 108), for instance, LI Yawei and Boorism were influenced by the Beat Generation, ZAI Yongming by American Confessional poetry, WANG Yin and CHEN Dongdong by American Deep Image.

Influenced by different schools of American post-modernist poetry, the Third-Generation poets developed their own characteristics in poetics and practice. Generally speaking, the Third-Generation poetry shares some similarities presenting a trend of anti-ration, anti-loftiness and anti-hero; advocating civilian consciousness; emphasizing the reflection of survival psychology and survival situation of human in poetry; stressing aesthetically an elimination of subject and an exile of subject's emotions; writing out a mental process of individual's vagrant and wandering experience; proposing an individual writing, an automatic writing and a purified poem writing. They argue that the Misty poetry has not penetrated into a place where one's psychology and physiology could be fused together, not touched the core of human life. They propose a realization of inward movement toward inner life itself in poetry which was definitely anticipated by Robert Bly in his famous essay "A Wrong Turning in American Poetry".

American Deep Image in China

As one of the most important schools of post-modernist poetry, Deep Image was a rebellion against New Criticism, including mainly Robert Bly, James Wright, Louis Simpson, William Stafford, and Galway Kinnell. Unlike the imagism's publication of manifesto, and definite proposal of three principles in poetry writing, Deep Image is a loose organization, which has no systemic poetics. Its poetics is mainly present in Robert Bly's books like *American Poetry: Wildness and Domesticity*, *Talking Poetry All the Morning*, *Leaping Poems*, and some of his interviews, letters, and prefaces of poem collections. Bly, defines a poem as "something that penetrates for an instant into the unconscious" (Bly, 1990, p. 33) and initiates the concept of deep image which, according to Bly, emerges from "within", purportedly contained in unconscious, delusion, dreams and disorderly association (Davis, 1992, p. 71). In Bly's eyes, the image hidden in one's deep heart is rather true, valuable, and enlightening at its best, and can also best reflect the essence of modernism, so it is most poetical. "The core of Bly's theory is that through the exploration of unconscious, the leaping of imagination and transformation of metaphor could become possible, and images could also jump out of psyche" (WANG, 2002, p. 221). Bly proposes "free

association” and “leaping”, and thinks, “The poet who is leaping makes a jump from an object soaked in latent or instinctive psychic substance. One real joy of poetry—not the only one—is to experience this leaping inside a poem” (Bly, 1990, p. 47). What is leap? “That leap can be described as a leap from the conscious to the latent intelligence and back again, a leap from the known part of the mind to the unknown part and back to known” (p. 42). That Robert Bly proposed an inward movement in poetry is closely related to the situation after World War Two, when American poetry presented a declining trend under the impact of T. S. Eliot and Academism style. As Bly mentioned in several interviews, American poets of his generation argued that Academism poetry could only touch theory but never penetrate into emotion, only touch the formula but not innovation.

In China, it was WANG Zuoliang, a famous scholar, that first translated and introduced American Deep Image poems. In 1980, he translated our poems of Bly and published in the 1st issue of *World Literature*, followed by a short interview: “Talking with Robert Bly All the Evening”; in 1981, he translated James Wright’s poems and published in the 1st issue of *Foreign Literature*. During the next thirty years, more and more Deep Image poems, along with some prose poems and essays were translated and published in literary journals. Among the translators, Dong Jiping is undoubtedly the most outstanding one who devoted himself to the translation of Deep Image for more than twenty years. In 1998, he translated and published a collection of Bly’s poems in which more than 140 poems were selected from Bly’s ten volumes of poetry. In 2012, based on the former, DONG Jiping published another book in which he not only revised the previous version on a large scale, but also supplemented nearly 60 poems from five volumes published after 1998, and added a preface, two letters written by Bly designedly for Chinese readers, and a latest long interview. There is no denying that it is by far the most authoritative and complete Chinese edition of Bly’s poems to date. In addition, in 2003, DONG Jiping was authorized by W. S. Merwin, another important member of Deep Image, to select 380 poems and proses from all the volumes of Merwin and translated and published.

An Analysis of the Influences of Deep Image on the Third-Generation Poets in China

During the early years of 1980s, when those famous scholars like WANG Zuoliang, ZHENG Min, and ZHAO Yihen translated and introduced American Deep Image, the Misty School poetry was just splitting up. Some of Misty poets and other freshman in the field of poetry were reflecting on Chinese modern poetry, and were in painstakingly exploration. Most of them were college students for whom reading the lately translated Western modernist and post-modernist works in those journals on foreign literature like *Foreign Literature*, *World Literature*, and *Foreign Literature and Art* could be regarded as a splendid experience. Moreover, at that time, the break of traditional literature and art, and the declining of the Misty poetry aroused in them a skepticism about their creation and an anxiety for the future of Chinese poetry in the early 1980s, which could be found in Bly when he published “A Wrong Turning in American Poetry” (JIAN, 2008, p. 108).

Chen Dongdong, an important member of “Maritime Poem Group”, recounted by himself:

When my college life proceeded to the second or third year, my notebooks copying poems amounted to over ten...during my college years, I had never taken class notes, but I persisted in copying poems almost everyday, at least every week. My copies were classified with poetry’s nations and schools, while most of them were restricted to individual poems, of course including Elytis. ...The individual copies lately were dedicated to Wallace Stevens whom I loved more than Elytis, and to Pound who inspired me so much. The list of poets endowed with my dedication also covered Locard, Paul Eluard, Robert Bly, Gary Snyder, Neruda... As you presume, copying is not only a way of close reading, but also

conscientious imitation. Thus those copies, I don't know where to hide, exactly remain my honest practice as a poet apprentice. (CHEN, 2008, p. 76)

During the period, American Deep Image poetry and poetics had been translated and introduced on a large scale, seldom in the whole American postmodernism. No wonder the Deep Image would exert so great influence on the Third-Generation of poets in China, especially on “Maritime Poem Group” represented by WANG Yin and CHEN Dongdong.

WANG Yin, another important member of “Maritime Poem Group”, had showed great interest in foreign literary works since studying in middle school due to the influence of his parents. After entering college, especially having read Robert Bly and James Wright's poems, unconsciously he imitated their style, beginning with a long title of a poem which was regarded as a distinguished feature of most of Bly and Wright's poems (In fact, Bly and Wright borrowed it from Chinese classical poetry, such as Du Fu's poems). As a result, WANG Yin created quite a few poems entitled with a long phrase or sentence, such as, *Remembering a Czech Movie but Forgetting Its Name, After Taking an Exam of Rhetoric, Students Sit on an Bench Having Their Shoes Repaired*. Afterwards, imitation gradually changed to an influence which diffused slowly into Wang's poetry writing. In 1986, Wang wrote and published a poem entitled *Talking with Robert Bly All the Evening*—a title of an interview of Bly by WANG Zuoliang—to express his appreciation for Bly.

The grass flourishes in the moonlight. / For a long time, there remained uninhabited. / For a long time, I've never thought of him. / Like the red star in the sky, his lonely chin is shining. // Sitting still in the thick grass against night, / with fingers crossed together, / I forgot the dawn's coming, / and parting from with books for years // A white horse heads its way to us, a white butterfly treads daintily through insects' twittering and fireflies' light.

In this poem, with an extremely cool narration, precise details and a lively rhythm, the poet depicts a scene where in the night he remembered an anchorite poet or a thinker poet in distance. Obviously “Talking with Bly All the Evening” is an inter-text to Bly's “Chrysanthemum” (planted for TAO Yuanming who likes them).

Tonight I rode again in the moonlight! / I saddled late at night. / The horse picked his way down a dead-furrow, / guided by the deep shadow. // A mile from the yard the horse rears, / glad. How magnificent to be doing nothing, / moving aimlessly through a nighttime field, / and the body alive, like a plant! // Coming back up the pale driveway, / how calm the wash looked on the line! // And when I entered my study, beside the door, / while chrysanthemums in the moonlight!

Bo Hua once discussed the relation between Wang Yin and Bly in “Looking on and experiencing”:

In “Chrysanthemum”, Bly uses the image “chrysanthemum” to combine Tao Yuanming with himself, which assembles a tone of poetry pal in China's classic poetry. It conveys a specific relation or a deep involvement, or an interlinked attitude in culture and ideology, between the narrator and the readers. Similarly, Wang Yin also adopts the same tone, regarding Bly as his poetry pal. The title “Talking All the Evening” and “For a long time I've never thought of him” in the poem clearly indicates the “closed” relation. As a result, firstly, the poem is considered as a kind of self-identification, that is, the Taoist spirit of hermits that Bly has been seeking was also accepted by Wang Yin. Secondly, Wang's poem explicitly revived the artistic prospect in Bly's lines. (LIU, 2013, p. 89)

In addition, both of them use some similar images, such as, “night”, “horse”, “grass”, and the “white” color, to describe a kind of “stillness”, “missing”, and “thinking”, which conveys an interaction of poets' psyche.

CHEN Dongdong, was born in Shanghai. He began to write poems shortly after entering college—Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Shanghai Normal University. In his second college

year, he started a poetry periodical *Poetry* along with his classmates and poets WANG Yin, LU Yimin, etc. So far, he has published 10 collections of poems, represented by “One Night of Sea-god”, “Clear Part”, and “Variation of Words”, and nearly a thousand poems, represented by “Lighting Up”, “Horse in Rain”, “Moon”, “Autumn”, “In Sick”. His early poems, influenced by Misty Poetry, devoted particular care to musicality and imagery. Later, his poems, influenced by Robert Bly and Deep Image, deliberately created almost unreal artistic conception through words game, free combination and association of images, to interpret the outer world. Many scholars mistake his style as influenced by French Surrealism. As CHEN Dongdong recounted, Robert Bly and Pablo Neruda are among those who were copied, read, and imitated, but there is no Breton. WANG Guangming argued that most of CHEN Dongdong’s poetry does not give expression to great themes and sharp thoughts but powerful imaginations (WANG, 2008, p. 230). The “power of imagination” refers to leaping of images and free association. Robert Bly often engages image and imagination in discussion, and holds that imagination helps poets create images, which imply certain logics and connect the world of life and the world of death (Bly, 1990, p. 279). When a poet is trying to release a poem’s images from a prison built with numerous objects, imagination should go through the whole poem. Once it is done, the poem would naturally go into unconsciousness (p. 34). An image differentiates from a picture in that an image is imagination expressed in natural words, incapable of drawing from or putting in a real world (p. 32). The major distinction of Robert Bly’s Deep Image (New Surrealism Poetry) from Surrealism in terms of creation is: Breton favors utmost exploration of unconsciousness and utter release of reason, and advocates automatic writing. Robert Bly and his school “also claim exploration of unconsciousness, but unlike French Surrealism, they don’t repel consciousness thoroughly. Instead, they hope to find kind of hidden connection between consciousness and unconsciousness” (WANG, 2002, p. 221). The hidden connection just lies in his so-called logical imagination. CHEN Dongdong is obviously inclined to hold the latter. In an interview, CHEN Dongdong (2008) remarked, “Poetry is the humanity, and I define it as an instinct of non-animality within a man. The reason that I write poems is that I attempt to explore and discover the poetry hidden in the psyche” (p. 75). CHEN Dongdong’s definition of poetry and his explanation of the purpose of writing poem is surprisingly in accordance with Bly’s statement. Above all, a detailed process of his poetic creation, as he describes as follows, seems all the more to agree with creation mode of Deep Imagism.

I sit at the desk beside window in the morning and start my writing. At the beginning, I find no particular direction walking in the field, with my pen point acting as a dog’s nose on the paper. Then the repeated smear gives light to your discretion, just like your eyesight has already been adapted to darkness. Near the end, your creation turns explicit and steadfast, and finally shaped, ... A poem is always automatically born in the complot of paper and pen, but it does not prove that my writing is totally accidental and at random, without preparation and conception. Nevertheless, conception for me would not be a considerate design. It is just a fancy, or an imagination. (CHEN, 2008, p. 77)

Chen Dongdong’s *The Beast of Fantasy* is a typical deep image poem.

The beast of fantasy, lonely and beautiful, walks through / twelve sleepy porches. It throws shadow on / the autumn’s tune, and its blue fur / looks like the heavy snow in nocturne arising from a piano. // The beast lives in the dream of a player / and steps into a circular drama / considering daylight as a horse, as the sun of lion body. / A fire of roses sprays from rainy season. / the full moon is shining on Scheherazade, while a big lizard idled a nice night away in Sudan. / The player walks out of a stone palace-- / A full blooming flower as the shadow of flame, sings constantly with a voice-pattern.// awaked in the morning, he caught a winding chimney in the sunlight / a walnut up in the autumn standing. / By whom the beast of fantasy would be widely read. (ZHANG, 2002, p. 76)

In this poem, the poet presents more than twenty images, such as, beast, porches, player, horse, piano, drama, roses, big lizard, stone palace, chimney and walnut. It is inferred from the beast that the poet lives in a beautiful dream. Those images which are seemingly in no way related indicate a fantastic memory jumping out of the poet's unconsciousness. Unlike imagism poets' creating visual images, CHEN Dongdong produces a series of imaginative leaping. Understanding this poem needs a grasp of the covert connection between conscious and unconscious. The imagination in unconsciousness could be like a dream moving through twelve porches, coming to the autumn tune, and hearing cold and beautiful piano music from the snow. The piano player seems to be in a dream playing constantly a poetic drama in an illusory world, where days flash by as the glint of a white horse across a chink in the door and as the red sea of roses in summer. Under the moonlight, the heroin of Arabian Nights is telling her faithful love story. The player comes to a stone palace dreamily which will be melted down in an moment, while Scheherazade is singing with her sweet and illusory tune. At last, awaking from the fantasy dream, and seeing city polluted by modern industrial civilization, the poet could't help wondering, "Will the illusory poem be read forever?" Through "free association" and "leaping images", the poet firstly praises the wild imagination to produce a sweet and moving story, then shows his anxiety for the future of poetry by the end of 20th century.

In his another poem *The Clear Part*, CHEN Dongdong uses an unconscious delusion to interpret the objects in the outer world. In the poem, the involved and abstruse images and leaping irrational association with implied logic obviously demonstrate the characteristics of American Deep Image poetry.

Bluish green ancient records, / and the saved Sunday, the courtyard is in the sea-light. / When the lilac blossoms under the shining sun, the well remains still and cold. / When the singingbirds gather round in the gilded sunlight, / the bell is ringing and extolling. / the white temple separates itself from shadow, and raises its wings. (ZHANG, 2002, p.78)

Conclusion

Among the Third-Generation poets, not only WANG Yin, and CHEN Dongdong by far may be influenced by American Deep Image, others including WANG Jiaxin, XI Chuang, SONG Lin, BO Hua, LU Yimin, and MENG Lang are more or less affected directly or indirectly, in form or in thought. After 1980s, due to the influence of American post-modernist poetry represented by Deep Image and Confession poetry, along with the experimental poetic creation of lots of contemporary poets like ZHOU Lunyou, HAN Dong, OYANG Jianghe, YU Jian, XI Chuan, WANG Yin, LI Yawei, and HAI Zi, Chinese modern poetry ushered in a golden age in the middle of 1980s in poetic theme and poetic skill, and many a poetry school emerged one by one, which together brought up a new glorious prospect in the field of Chinese poetry with a hundred flowers blossoming, a hundred schools of thought contending.

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