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New

Chinese Poetry under the Influence of Western Poetic
The Origins, Development and Sense of Nativeness

西方诗学影响下的中国新诗

起源、发展与本土意识

中国新诗

黎志敏著

西南师范大学出版社

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Preface

There are two great poetical traditions continuing now in world history, the English and the Chinese, and the relations between them have been a focus of interest and scholarly discussion for a considerable time. The development of new forms of modern literary expression in the West has been part of a complex upheaval in cultural practice that has become known as Modernism; and the parallel or consequent upheavals in Chinese literary history have reflected, as well as influenced, a series of radical changes in twentieth-century Chinese social and national evolution. The interactions between these two Modernist tendencies were further complicated by the pivotal part played by certain major poets of American origin who became international figures in an Anglo-American aspect of European Modernism more widely considered; and the influence of English-language poetic innovation on Chinese poetic Modernism is yet further complicated by a French influence on English-American poetic exploration and also directly on Chinese literary experiment. In the Chinese context these extremely complex strands of development have also to be seen against the background of a radical severance from the deep-rooted and long-standing traditional forms of poetic composition; and of course the political history of modern China has played a decisive part in shaping and interrupting the social development of literary

practice. All of this is indeed a complex history, hard to unravel and to see clearly and to investigate with accurate knowledge from both sides: Anglo-American, and Chinese.

This monograph by Dr Li is a pioneering work, attempting a synoptic overview on the basis of a literary judgment well-tuned in both languages and with a close understanding of very diverse forms of textual practice. I must confess to some extended personal involvement in this investigation, since Dr Li's supervisor of research, Professor Ou Hong, was himself a student of mine at Cambridge on the nomination of his teacher and my friend and colleague Professor Dai Liu-ling, before Dr Li followed in his teacher's footsteps to work with me at Cambridge to complete the preparation of this study. Dr Li has also benefited from the earlier research of Dr Xie Ming, who preceded him in working with me at Cambridge on the production of his subsequently published Cambridge Ph.D. thesis. I also find myself, somewhat to my own initial surprise, a subject of part of Dr Li's review of contemporary English poetry in its recent development.

Only a reader who has attempted to disentangle the confusions and part-knowledge of the twentieth century development of modern Chinese poetry, against its Western background, will be able fully to appreciate the significance of this study in projecting a clear, orderly and convincing framework. This much is a conspicuous service to literary-historical understanding. But also beyond this framing perspective Dr Li has presented two closely analytic case studies which greatly extend the range of this work; showing specific kinds of response to the

challenge of poetic modernism by Chinese poets wrestling with problems of Western forms and innovations, working out the capacities of the Chinese language for novel kinds of expression that should even so retain and explore the power of the native language to implicate distinctively native forms of cultural experience. Indeed the historical argument about a speech-based language for modern poetry in China, by analogy with Western innovatory practice, became as Dr Li shows a polemic strand in the quarrel of language (*Wenyan* vs. *Baihua*) and in the emerging strong predominance of literary prose.

These two major case histories display Dr Li's own critical acumen and insight into new experiments with form and imagery and poetic imagination. They demonstrate the deeply individual variations to be found in response to a wider cultural challenge. They give to the experience of reading and tracing the evolution of New Chinese Poetry a distinctive poetical aspect; this is not a general cultural history with add-on poetic flavor, but is deeply committed to understanding the implicit forms of poetic imagination during a very rapid succession of major shifts and changes. Poetry is made by poets and consists of poems, made from the language that poets make from the itself contested native stock of speech and writing in the world around them; and Dr Li brings a strong sense of these aspects to the argument of this study.

With an adroit turn of his treatment Dr Li then explores how the traffic of influence was by no means all in one direction; and sets out the many strands (some of them based on by now celebrated misconceptions) of Chinese influence on West-

ern Modernism. And then further to emphasize the concern with writerly practice, he has conducted interviews and collected responses from scholars and poets from several different countries, to assemble a background of live current working attitudes and perspectives and diagnostic conclusions that place this study firmly within the continuing attempt to grasp the contemporary realities of poetic development in China, its most recent past running forward into the possibilities for its future.

There is much for the reader of this study to learn, by active scrutiny of these discussions and reconsideration of earlier part-perspectives and part-understandings. There is a keen sense of commitment to the project of a modern poetic advancement for China that will also be understood correctly by critics and readers and by the poets themselves; so that a coherent future prospect may emerge from earlier prolonged diagnostic confusions. The outlook is optimistic, claiming a serious place for innovation in Chinese poetry that will continue to discover new connections with its traditional roots as well as with the larger international world of literary practice in all its energetic diversity. Each part of this study rests on firm foundations, of knowledge and judgment; the parts are worked into a dynamic balance, of analysis and clarification; so that by a striking combination of Chinese and Western scholarly aptitudes the result is a substantial step forward in our critical and imaginative understanding.

J. H. Prynne

Guangzhou, 19th June 2005

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Ou Hong, who has been generously providing me with wise advice throughout the past three years. Prof. Ou has been backing me up whenever it is necessary, and he granted me the chance to visit Cambridge University for one year and kindly introduced me to Mr. J. H. Prynne, with whom Prof. Ou did his post-doctorate research work fifteen years ago. Indeed, Prof. Ou has made everything leading to this thesis possible.

My learning experience at Cambridge University owes greatly to Mr. Prynne who kindly smoothed the way for me to "crack" all sorts of academic "hard nuts" and generously showed me the way into the wonderful Cambridge academic tradition symbolized by Freedom, Equality and Individualism. Mr Prynne had always encouraged the free expression of my views, granting me complete academic equality with him so that tête-à-tête discussions could go on between us, which often clarified or inspired my mind. Another Cambridge teacher to whom I owe a lot is Dr Rathmell, whose regular meeting with me greatly deepened my understanding of English poetry.

During the process of my investigation of the current situation of New Chinese Poetry and Western poetry, a lot of people provided me with precious help. They are Prof. Huang Xiuji,

Prof. Nie Zhenzhao, Prof. Sun Yushi, Mr. Kevin Nolan... to mention only a few. And in the finalization of this thesis, Prof. Li Gengzhou, Prof. Mao Sihui and Prof. He Hailun offered me invaluable advice.

Despite so much help I have obtained from my teachers and friends, there still might be some defects in this thesis, which are certainly all mine.

And finally, I shall express my gratitude to the people of the Division of Science Research of Guangzhou University who kindly provided necessary funds for the publication of this thesis.

May, 2002

Abstract

This thesis studies the Western poetical influence on New Chinese Poetry, in an attempt to settle many disputes concerned with New Chinese Poetry. It looks into the relationships between New Chinese Poetry and the Western poetics from historical, social and poetical perspectives, with reference to my personal interviews with poets, critics and readers in China and in the West; as a result, some suggestions are presented for the development of New Chinese Poetry. The whole thesis is divided into five Parts, or sixteen Chapters.

In Part One, Chapter One and Chapter Two carefully examine the social and academic background that contributed to the germination of New Chinese Poetry. The conclusion is that, if there had not been the social background in China at the beginning of the twentieth century, there might not have been New Chinese Poetry; at least, it would not have happened in such a dramatic manner. If something had to happen according to pure poetical reasons, it would have happened in a gradual manner, similar to the cases throughout the poetical development and growth in the history of China. Chapter Three of Part One carefully examines Western Modernism that serves as an origin of New Chinese Poetry. Some attempts have been made to define Western Modernism, of which the background

and main characteristics are also analyzed.

In Part Two, Chapter Four divides the development of New Chinese Poetry into three stages: the Formation Period, the Misty Poetry Period and the Individual Creation Period, in which adequate evidences are presented to prove that New Chinese Poetry was indeed formed under the direct influence of Western poetics and has been following it up till now. It touches only slightly on the period from 1949 to 1978 when China was isolated, if not completely, from the West.

Chapter Five and Chapter Six are of two case-studies to show the Western poetical influence on Chinese individual poets. In Chapter Five, Xu Zhimo, a famous new Chinese poet during the Formation Period, who lived abroad for some years, is studied in detail, and his Western poetical characteristics are revealed. In Chapter Six, Gu Cheng, a famous Misty poet, is carefully studied with concentration on the Western characteristics of his poetry. And then in Chapter Seven, a comparison of the characters between New Chinese Poetry and Western Modernist Poetry is made to show their similarities and differences.

In Part Three, Chapter Eight demonstrates that poetical influence between different cultures does not happen groundlessly, as it always, consciously or subconsciously, observes the theory of "Sense of Nateness". In order to have a dialectical understanding of the poetical relationship between China and the West, Part Three demonstrates that traditional Chinese poetry actually played an essential role in the development of twentieth century Western poetics that had been so much influ-

encing New Chinese Poetry. Chapter Nine of Part Three studies Ezra Pound carefully and finds that Ezra Pound, who had shed light on most Western Modernist poets, could not have become Ezra Pound if deprived of the Chinese poetical characters in his poetry and poetics. It is proved that Chinese poetics formed the background and core of Pound's most famous works *Cathay* and *The Cantos*, and in his poetical theories Imagism and Vorticism as well. But that is not to deny Pound's own originality.

Chapter Ten of Part Three makes clear that J. H. Prynne, a prominent contemporary English poet, is undoubtedly influenced by Chinese poetics; Prynne even successfully composed a poem in the Chinese language. Part Three concludes that traditional Chinese poetry is indeed a precious heritage for poetry of the world, which suggests that New Chinese Poetry should never ignore its own tradition while importing poetics from abroad.

Part Four presents the result of my personal investigation of the current poetical situation in both China and the West, which is based on interviews, questionnaire, and research work on printed materials. Altogether about three hundred and fifty poetry-readers answered my questionnaire, and around thirty poets or critics accepted my interviews. The results of my investigation are selectively presented, so that they could respond to the spirit of this thesis.

Part Five discusses the major problems concerned with New Chinese Poetry from various perspectives and gives some suggestions and advice for the development of New Chinese Poetry. Chapter Fourteen concentrates on the discussion of the rela-

tions of New Chinese Poetry with traditional Chinese poetry and Western poetics, which proposes that New Chinese Poetry should learn from both in a balanced manner. Only in this way, a harmonization of Chinese and Western poetics could be obtained, which will greatly promote the growth of New Chinese Poetry.

Chapter Fifteen discusses some general or specific problems and challenges to New Chinese Poetry, and suggests that New Chinese Poetry should adapt itself to the New Era to solve the problems and develop itself. In the final chapter, some poetical issues concerned with New Chinese Poetry, such as the spirit of poetry, rhyme and rhythm, the language of poetry, form and content, are discussed in an attempt to lay some basis for the appearance of some mature theories of New Chinese Poetry in the future.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the future of New Chinese Poetry, suggesting that it will continue to make progress and that it will last forever even though it might not be so prosperous as in the ancient times.

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