

乌托乡之音

徐青根诗选

Voice from a Utopian Village
Poems by Qinggen Xu



徐青根/著



苏州大学出版社
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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

乌托乡之音:徐青根诗选:汉英对照/徐青根著.
—苏州:苏州大学出版社,2016.7
书名原文:Voice from a Utopian Village
ISBN 978-7-5672-1778-2

I. ①乌… II. ①徐… III. ①诗集-中国-当代-汉、
英 IV. ①I227

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2016)第 165107 号

书 名:乌托乡之音

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出版发行:苏州大学出版社(Soochow University Press)

社 址:苏州市十梓街1号 邮编:215006

印 刷:虎彩印艺股份有限公司

网 址:www.sudapress.com

E-mail: tangdingjun@suda.edu.cn

邮购热线:0512-67480030

销售热线:0512-65225020

开 本:700mm×1000mm 1/16 印张:16 字数:200千

版 次:2016年7月第1版

印 次:2016年7月第1次印刷

书 号:ISBN 978-7-5672-1778-2

定 价:35.00元

凡购本社图书发现印装错误,请与本社联系调换。服务热线:0512-65225020

Introduction for Readers of English

My friendship and professional collaboration with Xu Qinggen goes back more than thirty-five years. First, something about me, then about Qinggen and his poetry.

I spent most of my career as a lecturer in English and program administrator at Lehman College of the City University of New York, but I began to travel much of the world, and particularly Asia, as soon as I finished college in 1965. I finally began to visit China—a formidable civilization to study—in the late 1970s. Several brief visits led to a invitation to teach in China, and by great good luck my resume reached the Foreign Languages Department at Soochow University.

Suzhou City is ancient, as old as Rome, and is famous for its picturesque canals and bridges, its poetic little lanes, and its classical gardens. It lies in a rich region of rice and fish just south of the Yangtze River and is long associated with poetry, painting, delicate manners and a musical local dialect. For me, it was something like being invited to Florence in Italy or Kyoto in Japan.

In April 1979, moving toward the end of the academic year at Lehman, and preparing to depart for China in the summer, I knew only that Suzhou was a pretty place, but nothing about the university and little about what I would be asked to teach. In a mad moment I posed some questions to my October 1979 self: Will this have turned out to be

a mistake? Will the campus be some dreary suburban concrete pile? Will my hosts be rigid and suspicious and my students literal-minded and mechanical in their study?

In October I was able to answer my April self thus: The university, in the old city next to the Grand Canal, was founded in 1900 by American Southern Methodist missionaries, and as Dong Wu (Soochow) University had a distinguished academic program. The campus, with great trees, was a delightful architectural mix of gothic, Tudor and Chinese. Soon after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, all the missionaries had had to leave, but they left behind a Chinese faculty who could teach English and other subjects at a high level.

There had been much turmoil in China since then, and many political twists and turns. My arrival as the first American professor in thirty years was met with great enthusiasm and lots of dread.

The Cultural Revolution was not long over, and many academics had suffered greatly for their connection with "foreign things". But most decided that my presence was too good an opportunity to pass up, and my hosts were warm and gracious and solicitous of my every comfort.

What they asked of me was simple and challenging: "Catch us up!" On thirty years of missed advanced study, on developments over that time in language and literature (and, maybe, some solid information about the outside world). The department library had no book newer than 1950. I got my colleagues in New York to ship hundreds of books to start the catching up. I was asked to teach senior professors, middle-aged professors, young professors and senior undergraduates in separate groups. The English level was astonishingly high, but my teaching demanded absolute clarity of speech and extreme

care in expressing opinions or touching upon sensitive subjects. It was hard and wonderful work, for which I realized I had been preparing for many years, and the impressive intelligence of so many of my students—as well as their quickness to catch any sly joke of mine—made it all the more satisfying. After several months, during which I managed to make no public statement that caused trouble, nor behaved in any unseemly way as a very public figure on campus and in the city, we all seemed to heave a collective sigh and settled down to be friends.

My true, intimate friend already was Xu Qinggen. (The name is pronounced approximately “Shoe Ching-Gun”, and his given name, Qinggen, means “green root”, a truly rural name.) Qinggen was a young English teacher, a recent graduate of the university, and one of the several of the brightest kept on from each class as budding faculty. His privilege and burden, a source of some envy, was to be assigned as my assistant: interpreter, guide, go-between with the authorities, and even physical protector (though from what? a careening bicycle-cart, a fall into the canal?) He was also, of course, my constant student, but I was immediately also his. My Chinese language was still at beginner-level, and through long evenings he taught me as one might a child: language, poetry, calligraphy, painting, history, folklore. And, among many other things, I taught him much about the world from my travels.

In one respect, we were a slightly comic pair: the city kid and the country boy, the world traveller and the true provincial. I had been raised on the streets of New York City in fairly rough neighborhoods by cultured parents. He came from a largely illiterate farming family in a poor part of the province. I was educated free at the City University of New York. He was so bright a middle and high school student that he was plucked by the Communist Party out of his rural landscape up to the

heaven of university education. And later both character and intellect got him chosen to join the university faculty.

During the winter recess of that academic year we traveled across half of China together. I had the funds; he had the language and cultural knowledge. But he had never been out of Jiangsu Province and it was hard to control his stomach on his first plane-ride. Much comedy ensued. When we encountered local officials inclined to deny the rare foreign visitor access to one site or another, Qinggen, knowing the official could not believe an American and a Chinese could be friends, would complain bitterly about how hard it was to ride herd on a demanding foreigner. The sympathetic official would cave in, and we would walk away chuckling like children.

Thirty years later we traveled together what we called the other half of China. But in between, Qinggen had earned a degree in England, been to several American colleges as visiting professor, ridden a Greyhound bus for a month all over the States (tough peasant backside), gone on other foreign trips with education delegations, and risen to become, finally, Dean of the department. (I had taught at Soochow University two other academic years, returned there for many visits, hosted Qinggen and many other Suzhou guests and visiting scholars in New York, and become part of a little East China expatriate community in the New York area.)

That last paragraph points to what I find a central theme in Qinggen's poetry: the kind of double vision he has, being both farm-boy and intellectual, and as intellectual the recipient of both Chinese classical training and Western education. Through a single lens he sees old and new, rural and urban, provincial and cosmopolitan. I often think that we are one of the last generations to see the old human world

of timeless rural life, the world of disappearing villages and farms, and Qinggen comes from that world. It is fascinating to follow his dialogues with his son, raised in the city and now working for an American company.

The form of his poems, each written in two languages, embodies also a double vision. They are not exactly translations of one another. The Chinese versions are written in classical verse forms that go back many centuries. Not only are the meters and stanza forms familiar to any educated Chinese, but so are allusions and turns of phrase, patterns of parallelism and antithesis. For English readers, the first impression Chinese poetry gives is that of terseness; with no need of articles or prepositions, with no grammatical tags of tense or number on the ends of words, the poems seem reduced to essential words only, and every word carries weight. I am no expert on Chinese poetry, but on long Suzhou evenings Qinggen coaxed me through the doorway of that poetic tradition, so that often enough my amateur eye catches just what he is doing.

When he writes the English version, he is working very differently, usually with a longer line and a lot more words, as English, with its demand that we be grammatically specific all the time, requires. I have found Qinggen, over many years of exchanging letters, to be one of the most inspired, original and delightfully quirky writers of English I have ever read. Some might ask, “Does that mean a little rough, somewhat imperfect, not always entirely idiomatic?” Well, yes. But I would not trade him for any number of writers of dull and flawless English. And I am rarely inclined to correct or “improve” his writing, beyond simple proofreading. I fully believe that, if he had been born in New York, his English writing would be many times superior to anything I could write.

And he is a poet, something I cannot claim in any way to be, though my love of poetry is at the heart of my professional life and work. I have had the privilege and pleasure to be one of his several English readers, and I sometimes beat him up over a particular word or phrase, though he often makes a spirited defense, and in the end I usually agree. In Xu Qinggen, I think the English reader will discover a new poetic voice, one that explores our modern life from a rich, rare and complex perspective, yet sticks with the simple and deep experiences and feelings that all lives share.



Robert Carling
The City University of New York
New Year's Day 2016

序 言

青根教授和我都是江阴人,又同在苏州大学共事。他在外语学院教授英语文学,我在文学院教研中国古典诗歌。我在读研究生的时候听过他的英语课。他对我的种种鼓励,我更是铭记在心。他高尚的品格、精湛的专业水平都使我自然地奉他为榜样。因此,三十多年来,我都是对他执弟子礼的。这是我发自内心的尊敬使然。他让我为他的汉英双语诗集《乌托乡之音》作序,我感到非常荣幸!

在去年下半年,方汉文教授提出了“外国文学中国化,中国文学世界化”这一宏大的目标。前者固然不容易,后者显然更加困难。我国大量的古典名著有英译本,可是不要说诗词歌赋,就是《金瓶梅》之类通俗小说的英译本,在欧美读者其实是极少的。(我曾经关注过。)如何使中国文学走向世界,这需要我们的辛勤探索。青根教授这本《乌托乡之音》正是这样的探索中一项可喜的重要成果。

青根教授以汉英双语创作诗歌,这是一般的诗人无法做到的。我常常听到人们说,我国古典诗歌格律很难掌握。其实不然,稍有汉语基础知识的人,认真听我的一次讲座,几乎没有不会的。英文诗歌的格律其实要难得多。且不说“十四行诗”之类,就是一般的英语诗歌,押韵规律之类,比我国的格律诗要繁复得多。老实说,我到现在还没有完全弄明白。1985年,青根教授在英国曼彻斯特大学读研,学成回国后长期从事英语诗歌的教学与研究,对英语诗歌当然是行家。因此,他用英语创作诗歌,可谓驾轻就熟,游刃有余。我这样的外行读来,也觉得文从词顺,朗朗

上口。

这本诗集中绝大部分篇幅是20世纪50年代以后我们家乡农村原生态的记录。例如,《春播颂》等写一年四季的农事,《扁担颂》等写种种农具,《仲夏村夜景》等写农村风情,《豪爽的春花》等写一年四季农村的景色,《补丁颂》等写艰苦的生活。《母爱列传》、《蛇盘田鸡》等写农村的常见动物,而《牛的沉默》、《悔蓐》则写人和动物之间的伦理关系,尤为动人。《野草梦》写少年割草的艰难,我少年时代,这也是不小的苦恼。以原生态的农村作为文学艺术的题材,这已经有不少人这样做了。可是,《乌托乡之音》有其独特的过人之处。

古典诗歌中不乏以原生态农村为题材的作品。可是,孟浩然、王维的“田家乐”也好,白居易等的“田家苦”也罢,包括许多其他体裁的古今作品,作者确实也是在观察农村生活,甚至体验农村生活后写成的。可是,“观察和体验生活”怎么及得上“在生活中体验和观察”?田园诗大家陶渊明所写是他感受的田园,他至少还有足够的酒可以喝,还有足够的时间读书和写作,甚至他还有仆人,他和农民及其生活之间毕竟隔了一层!可是,青根教授,他就是亿万农民中的一个!这样的体验和观察,本身就是原生态的一个重要部分,其真切是无与伦比的。

这样的体验和观察产生的感情自然是真挚的、强烈的、深厚的。感情,正是诗歌的生命!不同的文学体裁有不同的功用。诗歌的最大功用就是抒情。“诗言志,歌缘情。”其实,“志”也是情的一个类别。诗歌中的感情当然以真挚、强烈、深厚为好。那么,这本诗集中所抒发的感情,除了真挚、强烈和深厚外,内涵方面又有哪些特点呢?限于篇幅,我只能略举一二大者。时代精神是贯穿该诗集始终的灵魂。对那个时代的“时代精神”内涵的认识和评价,尽管有这样那样的不同,但是淑世情怀和奋斗精神应该是无法否认的。20世纪50年代到70年代,农民的辛勤劳作、贫困生活、无私奉献都在这诗集中集中地体现了出来。这些就不用我在这里

举例了。

更让我引起共鸣的是,对当代农村的情况,诗人也做了反映,并且表示了深沉的忧虑甚至愤怒。现在,农民经济上富裕起来了,但是文化方面没有多少改善。他们还是那样粗鲁,没有摆脱千百年来的种种陋习。《重逢》中诗人少年时代的伙伴就是如此。特别对农村生态环境的现状,诗人简直伤心欲绝!《寻梦》云:“年年回乡,总有一种朝圣的感觉,总会追寻五十年前的梦想。那年春天,我把一颗梦的种子,浸透汗水,植埋在家乡的苗床。如今我告老还乡,发现村子周围八百亩良田,长满了一枝黄花和芦苇,眼前一片荒凉!我脚踩芦苇,环顾四周,怀旧,愤慨,失望!谁动了我的血地?我那梦的种子,今在何方!”对工业文明弊病的揭露和谴责在世界文学中早已有之。可是,青根教授的诗篇内涵更为深刻、感情更为强烈和深沉。我们曾经胸怀新农村的美好蓝图,在家乡苦干。我们离开家乡的时候,对家乡有这样或那样美好的期盼。我们尽管长期离开家乡,但是家乡有我们的父老乡亲,我们仍然和那里血肉相连、息息相关!当我们回到家乡,看到的家乡的文化生态、家乡的自然生态和我们当年的蓝图、当年的期盼相比,落差是那么巨大!除了以歌当哭外,我们还能做些什么呢?可是,这歌哭本身不还是我们青少年时期养成的淑世情怀和奋斗精神的展现吗?但愿这些歌哭能够对人们有所警示,这也不枉了游子对家乡的一番苦心。可是,乡村建设之路到底在何方?难道我们当年心中的蓝图和期盼真的注定只能是乌托邦吗?!

使我特别感动的还有这诗集中关于亲情的诗歌。《父亲的水果刀》、《爸爸的道》、《妈妈的骂》、《我的大脚》、《父亲的肩》、《馄饨是啥味道》、《负债的心》、《奶奶的遗产》等诗篇都是写亲情的,特别是苦难中的可贵亲情,写得那样真切细腻。我们当年的生活尽管很苦,但是我们都是在长辈的爱和希望中长大的。我母亲现在还有时要对我说,当年困难的时候,母亲和父亲吃红花草,却给我吃粥,我还流泪,也要吃红花草。现在,我会

告诉她,我不是因为喜欢吃红花草才和你们争吃红花草,我是不愿意你们照顾我,不愿意你们吃了红花草去承担繁重的体力劳动,我要和你们一起承担苦难!但是,那个时候,我不愿意对你们这样说,怕你们伤心!因此,我读青根教授的这些诗歌,感同身受,甚至潸然泪下!有的甚至不忍卒读!

仅仅有真切、真挚、强烈、深厚的感情,还是不够的。诗歌有诗歌的特点。诗歌最为基本的特点,是以形象抒发感情,而不是直说。作诗要用形象思维,就是指这个特点。此外,诗歌比散文要更具有音乐性。这两个基本特点在青根教授的这些诗歌中都得到了很好的体现。例如,尽管这些诗歌是自由诗,但是还是很讲究押韵和音步的。平声韵和仄声韵通押,也是有依据的,效果也是很好的。这些不是青根教授诗歌最为突出的特点,我就不展开说了。

在艺术方面,该诗集最为显著的特点就是雅俗的奇妙结合。上文已经说过,该诗集中绝大部分诗歌是写原生态的农村,描写对象当然是俗的。可是,在诗人笔下,这些俗物俗事、俗人俗情大多是那样美好、那样脱俗。这样的诗篇在诗集中非常多,而最为典型的是《错位的浪漫》。此诗写一位拾粪少年的一天,他在寒冷的天气里辛苦劳作,而背景则是晨曦和朝阳;夕阳和晚霞,既明丽,又寥廓,而“口哼小调一步一拐,走向他闪着煤油灯光的家”,又是那样的充满喜悦和温馨。古人诗歌中有不少写俗事俗物的,但俗到拾粪这样的事情,我还真没有在古代诗歌中见到过。青根教授写了,还写得这么美!即使在当年的江南农村,拾粪这样的事情也只有非常勤劳的男孩才愿意做。青根教授应该做过,当然,我也做过。不论当时还是现在,如果没有足够的坦荡,怎么能够体验这样的美?!怎么能够写得这样美?!

雅俗如此奇妙地结合是有深层原因的。青根教授和我连名字都是土气十足,可是我们都进入了学术的殿堂,且都有在欧美大学开设课程的经

历。我研究中国古典诗歌,他则研究英文诗歌,而诗歌是高雅的艺术,古典诗歌和英文诗歌就更加显得高雅了。我们两个自身不就都是俗和雅的奇妙结合吗?

这些诗歌另外一个明显特点是语言通俗,这和原生态农村的内容是一致的。这些内容,如果我来写,我会用格调气韵都中规中矩的格律诗写,也许会写得典雅些。可是,如果写得典雅,那么其代价肯定是原生态色彩的流失。因此,还是以这样通俗的语言为好。

青根教授比较集中地创作诗歌,是在退休之后。这对我不仅是鞭策,而且还有很大的启发。他比我年长七岁,他尚且笔耕不辍,我有什么理由懈怠呢?他退休以后在原来学术研究之外的领域耕耘,我以后退休了,不也是可以如此吗?



赵杏根

2016年3月14日于独墅湖畔

前言

乡情成癖，乡愁纠结。

我与共和国同龄。我在田头河边度过的童年，朦朦胧胧印记着共和国初期的激情与冒进。当初，我的童心感受到了村民对新生活的热情和对美好未来的憧憬：互助组、合作社、人民公社；扫盲运动、农田河网化、农业大跃进；我的孩童天真在高音喇叭的嘹亮歌声中、在田野路边哗啦啦的红旗下面得到增升。一个世代散沙般的小农社会被轰轰烈烈地组织了起来，浩浩荡荡朝着一个大同世界进军。记得我光着脚丫戴上红领巾的时刻是我第一次感到光荣的人生；实龄不足16岁，我就在初二加入了共青团；我从此开始了争取人生第三大光荣的征程。未知这些竟然铸成了我今日绵绵不断的乡情。然而，村民怀着革命加拼命的意志，还是多年饱尝了受冻的痛苦和挨饿的折磨。这就是后来令我始终纠结的乡愁。

如今我已退休。偶尔回乡，我很少再能遇见当年清贫而热情的长辈，只能在村庄周围看到他们无声无息的墓碑；然而，他们当年在这片热土上喜怒哀乐的生活场景不停地在我脑海里徘徊。今天还有多少人能懂得，他们是这样的一代农民啊！自己饿着肚子，手推肩挑，自愿把最好的粮食送进国库！这堪称史无前例。我意识到自己是这个乌托乡的见证人，我理应留下点笔墨，用文字来收藏这个乌托乡草根生态的遗痕。

1987年我从英国留学回校后就一直为英语专业的本科生和硕士生开设《英语诗歌欣赏》这门课。罗伯特·弗罗斯特(Robert Frost)是我最喜欢的美国诗人。2008年我应邀去美国一所高校开设过《中国古典诗歌欣赏》课程。因此，我对中英诗歌就有了点感觉，以诗歌形式表达我对家乡的思念也就成了我很久久的夙愿。在退休后的两年中，我以中英双语撰

写了130多首诗作。毕竟我诗识浅薄,难为雅作。其中不少是自作自乐的打油诗。然而,我真诚邀请朋友分享我在诗中描述的情真意切的草根生活。

我的这次尝试从一开始就得到本单位俄罗斯文学学者陆肇明教授的鼓励;英文版还有幸得到我在美国纽约市立大学的罗伯特·卡林(Robert Carling)导师的精心指导;同时,他的爱妻刘美珠(Amelia LAU)画家热心为本书做封面和版面设计。我在此对他们一并表示诚挚谢意。我衷心感谢苏州大学出版社的大力支持。



徐青根
苏州大学外国语学院
2016年春节

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