

The Relation Between Natsume Soseki's Chinese Poems and Ancient Chinese Poetry

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Abstract: As an outstanding representative of modern Japanese literature, Natsume Soseki has an important position in the history of modern Japanese literature. He is a world-renowned novelist who has written many excellent novels. However, it is far from enough to study Natsume Soseki's literature only from the aspects of novels. Throughout Natsume Soseki's life, he studied Chinese studies since childhood, has great enthusiasm and interest in Chinese literature, and has a high accomplishment in Chinese literature. However, his outstanding ability in Chinese poetry was covered up by his writing ability in novels, which did not get the attention of the academic circle. Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems are in the same vein as Chinese poems, and he draws on and learns from ancient Chinese poems in the aspects of creation techniques and theme emotions. From the perspective of cultural studies, this paper makes an in-depth study of the relationship between Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry and ancient Chinese poetry by means of comparative study. On the basis of previous studies, this paper expounds Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry creation and its sinology origin, analyzes and summarizes the Chinese elements in his Chinese poetry works, in order to explore Natsume Soseki's contribution to the cross-communication field of Chinese poetry between China and Japan.

Keywords: Natsume Soseki, Japanese Chinese poetry, ancient Chinese poetry, the thoughts of Zen, cross-cultural communication.

1. Introduction

Natsume Soseki is a famous Japanese writer and an outstanding representative of modern Japanese literature. So far, Chinese scholars have not stopped studying Natsume Soseki's works. Nonetheless, they mainly focus on the novels, especially the famous works such as *I Am a Cat* and *Sanshirou*, and the academic papers have a large number of repetitive topics and contents. Although the research on Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry has increased in recent years, it is not complete and does not match with his achievements in Chinese poetry. In addition, although the research on Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems in Japan is earlier and more abundant than that in China, it is relatively less than that on novels.

The first chapter of this paper explains Natsume Soseki's Sinological literacy and the motivation of writing Chinese poetry from the background of his life. The second chapter illustrates the Chinese classics cited by Natsume Soseki in the process of writing Chinese poems. The third chapter is to explore the similarities between Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems and ancient Chinese poems on Zen

thought. The fourth chapter discusses the significance of Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry in the field of cross-cultural communication between China and Japan.

This paper aims to compare Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry with ancient Chinese poetry, explains the correlation between Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry and ancient Chinese poetry through comparative analysis, deepens the understanding of Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry, and explores the enlightenment of Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry in the field of cross-cultural communication between China and Japan.

2. Natsume Soseki's Sinological Literacy

2.1. The Era Natsume Soseki Lived

Natsume Soseki was born in 1867 and died in 1916. The Meiji period lasted from 1868 to 1912. It can be seen that Natsume Soseki's life lasted throughout the Meiji period. Therefore, in the study of Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems, it is inevitable to examine the social background and literary characteristics of the Meiji period [1].

The Meiji Restoration is a turning point in Japanese history, an important node in the transformation from feudal society to capitalist society, and Japan has embarked on the road of modernization since then. And Japanese literature also began to embark on the road of modernization under such an era background. The Japanese language, novels, dramas, poems and so on, were all improved to form a new modern literature [2].

The Edo period was the peak period of Japanese Chinese poetry. After the Meiji Restoration, Japanese Chinese poetry began to decline due to Japan's comprehensive study and absorption of advanced Western culture. However, Japanese Chinese poetry did not immediately decline with the change of times. In the Meiji period, the influence of Sinology was still there, and there were still many outstanding poets, such as Natsume Soseki and Oonuma Chinzan. It can be said that the Meiji period is the last peak in the history of Japanese Chinese poetry.

2.2. Natsume Soseki's Contact with Chinese Poetry

Natsume Soseki studied Chinese literature at an early age, and attended a private school of Chinese literature, and has been excellent in academic performance. He has a great enthusiasm and interest in Chinese literature. In this process, Natsume Soseki came into contact with a large number of Chinese books, such as *The Mencius*, *The Records of the Grand Historian*, *The Analects of Confucius*, *the Book of Songs*, and *The Zuo Commentary*. These classical works, which embodied the wisdom of ancient Chinese sages, deeply attracted Natsume Soseki, and he was obsessed with them, learning and absorbing rich knowledge and ideas of Sinology, which laid a solid foundation for his future Chinese poetry creation. Though he majored in English literature and studied in England, Natsume Soseki was more interested in Chinese literature than English literature [3].

When we talk about Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry creation, Masaoka Shiki has to be mentioned. Natsume Soseki and Masaoka Shiki were born in the same year and attended the same school. Both of them were interested in Chinese poetry, so they gradually became close in their relationship. They expressed themselves by writing Japanese Chinese poetry, and often sent Japanese Chinese poems to each other for communication [4].

3. Natsume Soseki's Chinese Poems and the Chinese Classics

Citing allusions is the concentration and sublimation of the accumulation of materials by the author, and then materials are redivided and combined to form a new organic whole. Also known as "borrowing" and "applying", the author borrows sentences or paragraphs from others' works and

integrates them according to the needs of his own expression to form a new whole, but the shadow of the original author's sentences or paragraphs can still be seen in the new whole [3]. Citing allusions is a common phenomenon in the form of literary expression. Specifically in Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems, that is to say, ancient Chinese poems are transplanted into the sentences and expressions of his own poems in a suitable way, so as to subtly express his thoughts and feelings, so as to achieve the ancient and modern mutual reflect. Here are a few examples of Natsume Soseki's use of ancient Chinese poetry.

3.1. Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems and *the Book of Songs*

"The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady. Gentleman is fond of courting (窈窕淑女,君子好逑)" is a famous sentence in *關雎* in *the Book of Songs*. Natsume Soseki applied this sentence to his own poems, such as "How graceful an inch of heart is, ethereal and ethereal, forgetting right and wrong (寸心何窈窕, 縹緲忘是非)" and "sitting alone in the graceful and empty white, the orchids shine into the tomorrow (獨坐窈窕虛白裏, 蘭缸照盡入明朝)". "The peach tree beams so red, How brilliant are its flowers [5] (桃之夭夭,灼灼其華)" in the poem of *桃夭* also be used for reference. Natsume Soseki wrote "Peach blossoms are burning brightly by the sun, and the scenery of willows is blurred, not satisfied with the wind (桃花赫灼皆依日, 柳色模糊不厭風)", "the peaches are about to bloom in the daytime, and the cranes begin to fly in the clear sky (夭夭正晝桃將發, 歷歷晴空鶴始飛)" and so on, based on this poem. Natsume Soseki still has lots of poems learning from *the Book of Songs*, but his main transformed poems are from *Guofeng* and *Xiaoya*. *Guofeng* is a folk song of about 15 vassal states, most of which are about the love between men and women, which accords with the characteristics of traditional Japanese literature. *Xiaoya* is based on real life, and the works about war and servitude are the most prominent, which can greatly arouse the resonance of Natsume Soseki, who is often in difficult situations [1].

3.2. Natsume Soseki's Chinese Poems and Du Fu's Poems

Natsume Soseki was very fond of Du Fu's poems. He often quoted Du Fu's poems in the early stages of Chinese poetry creation. This is because the early Chinese poems created by Natsume Soseki have the careless, fighting and critical spirit, which has the internal consistency with Du Fu's poems.

Natsume Soseki once wrote that "I rise and lie down in a small grass hut in the vast university, with only green mountains visible in my sight (起臥乾坤一草亭,眼中只有四山青)". This sentence is quoted from Du Fu's "暮春題瀼西新賃草屋五首", and the original sentence is "Life is full of ups and downs, my hair is messy, and in the vast universe, I am just a tiny grass hut (身世雙蓬鬢,乾坤一草亭)". "Looking far to the west, there is no end (西方決眇望茫茫)", and "A bird enters the clouds without a trace, a fish flows by itself (鳥入雲無跡,魚行水自流)" are inspired by "Clouds rise therefrom and lave my breast; My eyes are strained to see birds fleet [6] (蕩胸生曾雲, 決眇入歸鳥)", which is the sentence of Du Fu's *望嶽*. Of course, Du Fu's poems are more worried about the country and the people, satirizing reality, such as "most people of the rich will not starve to death, and most people of the well-educated will live their lives in poverty (衲袴不餓死, 儒冠多誤身)" and "I'll now and then for years, alone I'm on this height. Living in times so hard, at frosted hair I pine [7] (萬裏悲秋常作客,百年多病獨登臺)". Natsume Soseki also wrote corresponding sentences based on theses. For example, "more than half of people are idle in fifty years, and they are ashamed of missing their whole life without studying (人閑五十今過半, 愧爲讀書誤一生)" and "I cry a lot of tears when reading, and I stay in the mountain pavilion temporarily to brush away my sorrow (漫識讀書涕淚多, 暫留山館拂愁魔)" corresponds to the previous sentence and "it is easy to worry about

the country for the monarch, but it is difficult to get home as a guest (爲君憂國易,作客到家難)" corresponds to the latter one.

4. Thoughts of Zen in Natsume Soseki's Chinese Poems

In the traditional aesthetic spirit of Japan, "mono-no-aware (物哀)" and "yugen (幽玄)" can be said to be the most representative concepts. Both are rooted in Buddhist thought. In terms of literature, "mono-no-aware" is "revealing true feelings", which is when people touch the outside world, touching the scene and naturally pouring out emotions. "yugen" has the mysterious beauty associated with Buddhist thought, dominated by an ineffable and subtle meaning. Contrary to the expression of explicit, direct and sharp feelings, the thought of "yugen" has the characteristics of being secret, beautiful, serene and soft. It also has a mysterious and supernatural character, accompanied by a profound thought.

The Chinese poems written by Natsume Soseki contain a lot of beauty of "mono-no-aware" and "yugen". Such as in the "鴻臺", "鴻臺冒曉訪禪扉, 孤磬沉沉斷續微, 一叩一推人不答, 驚鴉撩亂掠門飛". This is the first Chinese poem recorded by Natsume Soseki to use the word "禪". "鴻臺" is a site of the Zen temple. The story revolves around the word "door". The poet goes to a temple in 鴻臺 early in the morning, hears the faint sound of a bell, knocks on the temple door, and pushes the door again, but gets no answer. Only crows, frightened by the sound he makes, fly past the door [8]. This "door" not only refers to the temple door, but also implies the door into the world of "Zen". The "door" is a door in the spiritual sense. Natsume Soseki wrote the poem as a teenager and began banging on this impassable "zen door". If this Zen door is not opened, it is impossible to enter the world of Zen, and it is impossible to leave the limited world. The use of zen images such as "禪扉" and "孤磬" in the poem directly adds the zen thought to the poem.

"Living in seclusion without people, I sit alone and sleep with wide clothes. Occasionally, the spring breeze relieves me and blows to the bamboo and orchids (幽居人不到, 獨坐覺衣寬. 偶解春風意, 來吹竹與蘭)" is written in the spring of 1916. The poem describes the pleasant scene of the poet sitting alone waiting for his friend to arrive. In the previous half of the sentence, "獨坐覺衣寬" belongs to the description of leisure and quiet mentality. The latter half of the sentence is the dynamic natural spring breeze, blowing to the static bamboo and orchids, the combination of the two to form a quiet, pleasant mood. The "幽居, 獨坐" and "來吹" used in the poem are a combination of static and dynamic. The poem finds beauty in everyday life and paints a picture full of Zen in words [8].

One of the reasons why Natsume Soseki loves to write these Zen Chinese poems is that he is familiar with Chinese Tang and Song poems, especially those of Tao Yuanming and Wang Wei. Therefore, in the process of creation, it is bound to be influenced by the artistic aesthetic creation techniques of Chinese poems represented by Tao Yuanming and Wang Wei. Natsume Soseki's *Kusamakura (草枕)* opens with a quote from Tao Yuanming's poem, "Picking chrysanthemums under the eastern fence, leisurely I look up and see the Southern Mountains [9] (采菊東籬下, 悠然見南山)" and Wang Wei's poem "In pathless hills no man's in sight, but I still hear echoing sound [10] (空山不見人, 但聞人語響)". Tao Yuanming's poems depict a state of mind that is free from the world, free and carefree, and a state of mind that pursues freedom and peace. Wang Wei is known in the Chinese poetry circle as the ancestor of Nanzong painting. He has a deep origin with Zen Buddhism and is called "poetry Buddha". The zen thought is one of the most distinctive features of Wang Wei's poetry [8].

It can be seen that in the creation of Chinese poetry, Natsume Soseki cleverly integrated his own life taste concept, and naturally formed the artistic conception of "zen poetry" to create the pattern of

Japanese native Chinese poetry, thereby realizing the transformation of Chinese poetry culture in Japanese context.

5. The Enlightenment of Natsume Soseki's Chinese Poetry in the Field of Cross-cultural Communication between China and Japan

Natsume Soseki absorbed the essence of classical Chinese poetry and quoted classical Chinese poetry in his creation to express his true feelings, which he then combined with the traditional Japanese culture to create. In addition, he also linked the common parts of Chinese and Japanese culture through Chinese poetry. For example, he wrote Zen Chinese poetry, which not only contains the Zen thought of ancient Chinese poetry but also combines traditional Japanese aesthetics.

In the common image group of "Zen poetry", the scenery is often right in front of the moment, ordinary and simple, with empty, quiet, natural, flowing, lonely and other images as the core repeatedly appear. Wang Wei's zen poems revolve around "emptiness" (empty mountains, empty forests), falling flowers, clouds and moonlight, deep forests, and ponds. There are also sound and shadow of instantaneous movement -- bell, bird song, cicada noise, stream and so on [11]. Tao Yuanming's poems are dominated by images such as birds, south mountains, sunsets and drinking. Natsume Soseki, after learning from ancient Chinese poetry, created Zen Chinese poetry, which mainly uses mountains and white clouds as images. For example, the last Chinese poem he wrote was "there is no cloud shadow in the distant sky, and the sound of falling leaves in the wind (迢迢天外去雲影, 簌簌風中落葉聲)" and "I forget my eyes and ears, and my body is also lost, I sing solo in the air, and white clouds also sing (眼耳雙忘身亦失, 空中獨唱白雲吟)". It can be seen that they chose the commonality of image when writing Zen Chinese poems.

Thus, it can be seen that Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry has made outstanding contributions in the field of Chinese and Japanese poetry. He not only successfully transformed ancient Chinese poetry into Japanese Chinese poetry, but also created Chinese poetry with its own unique characteristics by integrating traditional Japanese cultural thoughts. This has enriched the empirical evidence in the field of cross-cultural exchanges between China and Japan, provided a model for the development of cultural exchanges between the two countries, and also brought enlightenment on how to successfully spread Chinese culture.

6. Conclusion

This paper describes the cultural blending background of Natsume Soseki's time, explores the starting point of his Chinese poetry creation, exemplifies the parts of Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems, quoting classical sentences of ancient Chinese poems, and shows his familiarity and love for Chinese culture. In addition, this paper focuses on the Zen thought in Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems and traces its ideological origin with Tao Yuanming's and Wang Wei's Zen poems. This paper discusses Natsume Soseki's lifelong literary contributions in the field of Chinese poetry exchange between China and Japan.

The findings of this paper lie in the following aspects. The uniqueness of Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry is that it is quite different from the trend of "leaving Asia and entering Europe" during the Meiji period. The starting point of Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry creation is based on his childhood "reading Chinese books" and runs through his whole life. His poetry has the distinct imprint of Eastern Zen values.

Due to the limitation of space, this paper can not show the relationship between Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry and ancient Chinese poetry in many aspects and directions. The discussion of Natsume Soseki's thoughts in Chinese poetry is also superficial. However, this paper shows that Natsume Soseki can be called a sinologist and has made outstanding contributions in the field of sinology.

Compared with Natsume Soseki's identity as an excellent novelist, his identity as a sinologist has not been paid enough attention in the academic circle. However, the systematic arrangement of Natsume Soseki's Chinese poetry collection by Chinese scholars is not comprehensive and perfect. Although the relationship between Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems and Chinese classics has been studied, the number of selected topics is small, relatively repeated, and just based on the analysis of one or several poems. The combination of Natsume Soseki's life background, literary ideas and so on is not enough, so it is difficult to truly present the value and significance of Natsume Soseki's Chinese poems. This is also the direction that the author wants to further study and advance in the future.

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