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Temporal Narrative Strategies and Their Functions in Poetry: A Comparative Analysis of Su Shi's Yonghuai Poems and Natsume Sōseki's Kanshi

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Abstract. Based on modern narrative theory, this paper carefully studies time-based narrative methods and text functions in Su Shi's poems and Natsume Sōseki's Kanshi poems. It also carries out a cross-cultural comparative analysis of the two poets' works. The research results show that Su Shi uses many different narrative skills. These skills include changes in time order, adjustment of time length, and the two-way change between time and space. His free and natural poetic writing carries deep philosophical thoughts about personal life and the development of history. But Sōseki's Kanshi poems mostly follow a straight time order in narration. They also prefer to focus on scene description. The sense of time in his poems feels still and stagnant. He builds quiet and peaceful Zen worlds through slow time-based narration. He also seeks spiritual peace and understanding through his poetic writing. These works show his hidden sadness and thoughts about the meaning of existence. Both poets turn abstract time into something tangible with concrete images in their poems. They also rebuild objective physical time through personal inner thoughts and feelings. They reflect on the meaning of short individual life against the background of endless cosmic time. Both poets are deeply influenced by Zen philosophy and the literary ideas of Tao Yuanming. But there are clear differences in their writing styles. These differences come from different cultural traditions between China and Japan, personal life experiences, inner characters, and reasons for writing poems. Su Shi writes poems to express his aspirations and set his emotions free. Sōseki writes poems to seek spiritual peace and calm his inner unrest. From the angle of time-based narration, this study shows the aesthetic features and spiritual meanings of time narration in classical Chinese and Japanese poems. It also provides a new interpretive angle for cross-cultural poetic research.

Keywords: temporal narrative, cross-cultural comparison, poetic art, Su Shi, Natsume Sōseki

1. Introduction

This paper follows Zhou Jianzhi's definition of the term "narrative". In traditional Chinese poetic theory, narrative does not have an exact match with Western concepts of narrative study. Instead, it is a many-sided traditional poetic category. This category covers telling complete stories, recording short separate events, and writing fact-based accounts of real experiences.

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Besides the mainstream lyrical tradition, Chinese poetry has kept a clear and lasting line of narrative development, and this narrative tradition becomes especially noticeable in the poetry of the Song Dynasty. Dong Naibin[1]has sorted out the narrative tradition of Chinese literature in a systematic way. He has confirmed that poetry keeps a steady narrative feature along with its main lyrical style, and this work builds a good theoretical base for the narrative study of Song poetry [1]. From the angle of intellectual history, Japanese sinologist Yoshikawa Kōjirō put forward his view. He argued that traditional lyrical poetry often turned empty and abstract, and Song poetry emerged as a careful reflection and reaction to these limitations. Song poets were not satisfied with only capturing short moments of strong emotions. They turned to explore new writing topics and more detailed descriptions in their works. Even when they wrote about traditional themes, they made a clear shift. They moved from general lyrical description to detailed narrative expression, instead of only describing still and unchanging peak moments [2]. This view accurately points out the outstanding narrative characteristics of Song poetry. More research from Zhou Jianzhi clarifies an important point. Song poetry has a strong awareness of documentary-style narration. Song poets center their works on "events". They mix daily behaviors, scenes, and feelings in specific situations together. They stress truth and exactness in time, place, and characters. In this way, they build a real connection between poetry and actual life experiences [3]. She creatively put forward two concepts: "event imagery"[2]and "event scenario"[3]. She argued that Song poetry builds lively narrative situations through event imagery. This feature makes it fundamentally different from Tang poetry, which usually creates static artistic images through lyrical imagery [4]. At the same time, many scholars have proved the narrative nature of Song poetry from its textual features, and these scholars include Ji Lingjuan, Tan Zaixi [5], and Cai Longwei [6]. Song poems have longer titles, richer narrative elements, and complete logical structure in time order. These features further show their mature narrative qualities.

Time is the most important part of narrative works. In the research of Ci poetry, Wu Shichang set up two classic time-based structural models. One is the contrast structure of "human face and peach blossom", and the other is the recalling structure of "west window candle talk". These models provide basic examples for the study of time-based narration in classical Chinese poetry [7]. Zhu Xinliang used Mei Yaochen's poems as research materials. He studied the narrative functions of straight-line time and the change between time and space in Song poetry. His research proves that time-related methods in poems directly serve for expressing feelings and building themes [8]. In the book *Poetry Narratology*, Tan Junqiang used Gérard Genette's theoretical system in a systematic way. This system includes three points: order, duration, and frequency. He used it to analyze time-based narrative methods in lyrical works [9].

Present studies have fully proved the narrative features of Song poetry and realized that time plays a central role in poetic narration. But current research still has clear shortcomings. First, most

[1] Dong Naibin devotes himself to sorting out and researching the narrative tradition of Chinese literature. A Study on the Narrative Tradition of Chinese Literature (authored by Dong Naibin, Li Han, Yang Xurong, Wang Jihong, Liu Liang, Zhou Xingtai, Liu Zhuoxia and Ji Yunlu, published by Zhonghua Book Company in 2012), which he edited, stands as a key achievement in this research field.

[2] The concept of "event imagery" was put forward by Zhou Jianzhi. It refers to fragmentary existence refined through poetic processing, possessing both the element of "events" and the figurative traits of "imagery".

[3] The concept of "event scenario" was also proposed by Zhou Jianzhi, denoting the situational context of an event. By constructing event scenarios — recreating the circumstances that trigger his feelings and reflections, the poet conveys the experiences he gains from such situations.

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studies only focus on the inner text analysis of Song poetry and lack cross-cultural comparison of time-based narration. Second, there is not enough systematic theoretical summary of Su Shi's special time-based narrative methods. Third, few studies make targeted comparative analysis between Su Shi and Japanese Kanshi poets who are influenced by Su Shi's poetic style.

Under this research background, this paper uses close reading of texts to make a comparison. It compares Su Shi's classic Song poems with Natsume Sōseki's Kanshi poetry, which is deeply influenced by Wang Wei and Su Shi. By comparing their similarities, differences, and the deep reasons that form these features in time-based narrative functions, this study shows Su Shi's clear influence on Japanese Kanshi literature. It also fills the gap of narrative perspective in cross-cultural poetic studies of East Asia.

2. Temporal narrative strategies and functions in Su Shi's poetry

Modern narratology distinguishes two fundamental temporal categories in narrative texts: story time and narrative time[4] [10]. Story time follows irreversible, linear chronological development of real events. In contrast, narrative time allows authors to freely rearrange past, present, and future and adjust narrative duration. Different alignments between story time and narrative time generate diverse temporal narrative strategies, mainly manifested in three dimensions: order, duration, and frequency. Temporal order refers to the sequential occurrence of events; temporal duration denotes the time span of narrated events; temporal frequency describes the repetition of narrative events. Close textual analysis of Su Shi's poems reveals his sophisticated and flexible manipulation of temporal narrative techniques.

In the first year of the Jiayou reign (1056), Su Shi and his younger brother Su Zhe traveled to the capital for the imperial examination. They stayed in a Buddhist temple at Mianchi, inscribed poems on the temple wall, and befriended the elderly monk Fengxian. Five years later, when Su Shi took office in Fengxiang and passed through Mianchi again, he found the monk had passed away and their wall inscriptions destroyed. He thus composed a responding poem to Su Zhe's nostalgic work, *In Response to Ziyou's Nostalgic Poem at Mianchi*.

In Response to Ziyou's Nostalgic Poem at Mianchi [11]

What can human life be likened to? A wild swan treading on snow and mud. By chance it leaves claw prints in the mire; It flies away, regardless of east or west.

The old monk has passed, a new stupa stands; No trace remains of old verses on ruined walls. Do you still recall the rugged journey of old? The long road, weary men, and braying lame ass.

In the first four lines, Su Shi puts forward a profound philosophical proposition: human life is inherently contingent. Just as a wild swan accidentally leaves footprints on snow without deliberate intention, mortal existence is filled with unforeseen encounters. The subsequent two lines depict the irreversible passage of time and the transformation of circumstances. The deceased monk and ruined inscribed walls signal drastic changes between past and present. At this moment, narrative time suddenly stagnates and fixates on the desolate present scenery, forming a static scene of melancholy remembrance that contrasts sharply with the dynamic, fleeting temporal flow of the departing swan.

[4] Gérard Genette advanced the concepts of "story time" and "narrative time" in Narrative Discourse. Story time refers to the natural time in which narrated events originally take place, namely the genuine sequence, duration and rhythm within a real or fictional world. Narrative time, by contrast, means the time presented by the narrative text itself — the temporal form in which the story is recounted and perceived as readers read the text.

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This deliberate duration distortion freezes time at the poignant moment of "all things changed yet people gone". Such temporal deceleration emphasizes the stark past–present contrast, amplifying the vicissitudes and uncertainties of human life and embodying the poet's sorrowful sentiment—suffering always stretches subjective time endlessly. The final two lines adopt temporal order distortion by flashbacking to the journey with his brother five years earlier. The retrospective narration conveys profound longing and kinship. As the French scholar Gaston Bachelard argues: "True happiness has a past; the entire past returns to the present through imagination." [12] Happy moments revive through recollection, and nostalgia resides precisely in the remembrance of bygone bliss.

Su Shi also manipulates temporal order and duration in his poem *Turtle Mountain*.

Turtle Mountain [11]

Wandering all my life, what do I pursue? Five years have slipped by since I last saw Turtle Mountain. I have traveled ten thousand miles across half the world; A monk dwells in a hut, his hair newly turned white.

Cut off from the Central Plain, I gaze north with longing; Tides merge with the sea, urging my eastward journey. No one remembers the old tales of the Yuanjia reign; Do the crumbling ancient ramparts still stand today?

This poem was written in the ninth year of the Xining reign, when Su Shi was forty years old. It shows that he paid a second visit to Turtle Mountain at that time. The first couplet mixes the time of the past and the present, and expresses sorrow for the fast passing years and the ups and downs of life in the world. The lines that follow create a clear contrast in time. They achieve this effect by shortening some time periods and lengthening others. The line "traveled ten thousand miles across half the world" puts decades of traveling for official duties into just seven Chinese characters. It greatly shortens the narrative time and makes the story move at a faster pace. On the other hand, the line "A monk dwells in a hut, his hair newly turned white" describes the quiet and almost still life of a monk in a temple. It suddenly slows down the speed of the narrative. The changes between fast and slow rhythms build clear and vivid layers of time in the poem. The third couplet is a good example of a classic Chinese poetic skill: time and space can turn into each other. A broad sense of space makes people feel that time lasts longer and flows more continuously. The last couplet further fits six hundred years of historical time into just fourteen characters. This broad and sweeping description of time creates a deep sense of history. It also shows how small a single person's life seems when compared with the endless flow of time in the universe.

This poem also shows that Tao Yuanming had a deep influence on Su Shi. In his work *Spirit Interpretation*, Tao Yuanming thinks about how short and fleeting life is. He writes: "Where are the sage emperors of the Three Sovereigns now? Even Pengzu, who was famous for a long life, could not live forever." No ancient wise men or legendary long-lived figures can go beyond the limits of human life. This fact proves that a single person's existence is not important when placed against endless time and space. Su Shi shares this same feeling when he writes about the forgotten history of the Yuanjia period and the broken old city walls. His sadness and sense of helplessness spread across boundless time and space. But Tao Yuanming moves past this despair with a wise and open attitude. He says: "Drift with the great transformation, neither joyous nor fearful." Even though human life is fragile, people should accept their natural fate calmly. This positive and far-reaching view of life has a deep effect on Su Shi's poetic style. This influence can be seen most clearly in his famous work *Ode to the Red Cliff*.

Another key feature of Su Shi's time-based narration is the omission of time and the use of jumping time structures. Huihong, a scholar from the Hong area, called this method "inferring

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results from causes". Su Shi's poem *Southern Garden* shows this technique clearly. It reads: "After rain on mulberry fields, silk feels soft and fine; Wind sweeps wheat fields, bringing the fragrance of baked bread." When readers see the description of mulberry leaves, they will naturally think of silk, the final product of these leaves. And the image of wheat fields quickly makes people think of the smell of baked food. This jump in thought leaves out all the middle steps in between. It creates empty spaces in the text on purpose, gives readers more room to use their imagination, and makes the poem more delicate and interesting to read.

In conclusion, Su Shi uses many different and flexible methods for time-based narration. These methods give his poetry many different layers of meaning for readers to understand and explore. In his works, the flow of time moves freely according to his inner thoughts, and his personal feelings are deeply tied to how he sees and feels time. As Yang Yi states in his book *Chinese Narratology*: "Literary structure shows a special view of the world through language. It works as a complete whole that connects with real life. It controls the inner narrative process, reflects the author's real life experiences and philosophical thoughts, and carries on the structural traditions of narrative literature." The flexible changes of time order and time length in Su Shi's poetry fully show his unique feelings, philosophical ideas, and artistic style.

3. Temporal narrative strategies and functions in natsume Sōseki's Kanshi poetry

Japanese Kanshi refers to poems composed by Japanese writers in strict accordance with the metrical and tonal rules of classical Chinese poetry. As Japanese critic Kato Shuichi observes, Japanese literature adopted a bilingual writing system of Japanese and Chinese before the Meiji Restoration. The term *shiika* in Japanese collectively denotes both Kanshi (Chinese poetry) and *waka* (Japanese traditional poetry), making Kanshi an indispensable component of Japanese literary tradition[5] [13]. In his lifetime, Natsume Sōseki composed 208 Kanshi poems, ranking him among the pinnacle Meiji-era Kanshi poets. Born into a declining aristocratic family after the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate, Sōseki endured a miserable life. Abandoned by his biological parents in childhood, he suffered neglect and exploitation from his adoptive family. He later developed neurasthenia and endured chronic gastric ulcer in his later years, passing away from illness in 1916 at the age of less than fifty, having been plagued by depression and physical pain throughout his life. Deeply enamored with Chinese culture, Sōseki stated in the preface to his 1889 self-published Chinese prose work *Wood Chip Records*: "Since childhood, I have recited thousands of Tang and Song poems and essays, and delighted in literary creation. Sometimes I polished my writing elaborately for days on end; sometimes I composed impromptu lines, attaining a plain and natural charm." In his youth, he aspired to pursue a career through Sinology. His Kanshi creations bear clear influences from Chinese poets including Wang Wei, Tao Yuanming and Li Bai, while retaining unique temporal and national characteristics rooted in Japanese cultural traditions, with distinctive aesthetic value. Based on close textual reading of Sōseki's representative poems, this chapter explores his unique temporal narrative choices and the aesthetic charm of his works.

Untitled (I) [14]

Foolish in pursuit, my aspirations unfulfilled, Fifty years fleeting in an instant. Contemplating the Dao in silent stillness, Crafting verses solely for pure serenity. Distant cloud shadows drift beyond

[5] Regarding the definition of Japanese Kanshi, this paper adopts the definition set forth by Wang Guangsheng in Natsume Sōseki's Kanshi and His Aesthetic World (Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press). For full details, see page 1 of Natsume Sōseki's Kanshi and His Aesthetic World.

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the firmament, Fallen leaves rustle amid the wind. Suddenly through the quiet window's pale void, The moon rises over Eastern Hill, illuminating half the river.

Composed on the eve of his death in 1916 as his final Kanshi work, this poem was written when Sōseki turned fifty, at the terminal stage of his life haunted by chronic gastritis and neurasthenia. The opening line conveys the lifelong regret of devoting himself to pursuing the Dao yet failing to extricate himself from spiritual predicaments. Adopting a retrospective temporal perspective, the poet looks back on his fifty-year life trajectory from the present moment, expanding the temporal dimension of his regret. He condenses half a century of life into merely five characters with a rapid narrative rhythm, implicitly lamenting the transience of time and the fleeting nature of mortal life. The second couplet depicts his persistent pursuit of the Dao and spiritual liberation through poetic creation. The third couplet shifts to subtle scenic depiction. In stark contrast to the compressed narration of fifty years in the opening lines, the narrative pace slows dramatically. The poet fixates on trivial fleeting scenes: clouds drifting leisurely across the sky and leaves falling softly in the wind. His inner restlessness gradually calms, settling into tranquil melancholy. The final couplet advances the temporal flow further: moonlight spills through the quiet window, bathing the river in luminous clarity. In ultimate solitude and stillness, the poet attains sudden spiritual epiphany under the shining moonlight.

Grey Temples and Endless Sentiment [14]

Grey hair upon my temples stirs endless emotion, Years pass, between study and rural toil I dwell. Soft wind sways every slender willow branch, Cold rain murmurs through every parasol leaf. Far away, moonlight spills over mountain peaks, Constantly I hear streams echo through clouded vales. Recluse in peace, content with my aged fox fur, I seek plain hemp gowns and venture into town.

Composed in Sōseki's later years, this poem embodies his core late-life philosophy of *casting aside the self and conforming to nature*[6]. The opening lines trigger nostalgic melancholy for elapsed time at the sight of greying hair, recounting his repetitive life of academic study and rural seclusion amid fleeting years. The first couplet delivers a panoramic overview of his past life with a brisk narrative rhythm, setting the tone for the whole poem. The subsequent verses depict the serene and tranquil life of his later years through detailed scene portrayal. Gentle wind stirs willow twigs and cold rain rustles parasol leaves, weaving intertwined visual and auditory imagery to construct a three-dimensional spatial atmosphere. The phrases "gaze afar" and "linger in listening" highlight the vastness of space and the continuous flow of time. Employing the technique of *motion setting off stillness* and *sound accentuating tranquility*, the poem depicts a solemn, desolate and leisurely landscape, where time slows down infinitely and almost comes to a standstill. The concluding couplet expresses the joy of reclusive life and reflects on and criticizes his youthful pursuit of official fame.

Overall, Sōseki's Kanshi poems primarily adopt linear chronological narration with flexible narrative rhythm and abundant scene-based descriptions, constructing a serene, secluded and Zen-infused poetic atmosphere. Different from Su Shi's flexible temporal jumping narration that stirs emotional fluctuations, Sōseki rarely disrupts temporal order to amplify inner feelings. Regarding poetic creation as a way to attain inner peace and spiritual salvation, he is deeply influenced by Zen

[6] Tensoku Kyoshi (casting aside the self and conforming to nature) means abandoning personal subjective obsessions and desires, and letting go of worldly gains, losses and scheming. One complies with all things in nature to reach the integration of object and subject, attaining a realm of absolute spiritual freedom.

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philosophy of transcending mortal trivialities and maintaining spiritual detachment. Rather than expressing emotional ups and downs through poetry, he calms inner turmoil and heals spiritual unease, forming a temporal narrative strategy distinctly different from Su Shi's.

4. Comparison and analysis

Traditional Chinese literature, especially works of the Tang and Song dynasties, exerted a profound influence on Natsume Sōseki. Nevertheless, rooted in Japanese culture and living at a special turning point of Japan's modernization, Sōseki crafted Kanshi poems bearing distinctive personal and temporal features. An examination of how Su Shi and Natsume Sōseki perceive and deploy time in their verses enables a nuanced exploration of their similarities, divergences, and underlying contributing factors across their disparate historical and cultural contexts.

Both Su Shi and Natsume Sōseki embed the passage of time within changes of physical things. Kant once stated, "Time does not flow; rather, what flows is the mutable being of things within time" [15]. Humans cannot directly perceive time itself. It is the transformation of objects that endows temporal change with tangible meaning. For instance, in Su Shi's *Written While Drunk at Wanghu Tower on the 27th Day of the Sixth Lunar Month*, a montage of four scenes — dark storm clouds, sudden white rain, fierce gusts and merged water and sky — reconstructs the progression of a summer downpour. The sense of time's elapse emerges from these concrete natural phenomena. Natsume Sōseki's line "Grey hair upon my temples stirs endless emotion, years pass, between study and rural toil I dwell" embodies temporal flow through greying hair. Time leaves invisible yet real marks by whitening human temples. Put another way, the notion of time's passage arises precisely because all things age and transform. If everything remained eternally unchanged, time as we know it might cease to exist.

For both poets, time depicted in their poetry is not purely physical time but psychological time. The temporal arrangement in their verses flows naturally, shaped by individual subjective consciousness. When expressing sorrow over fleeting life, both accelerate narrative tempo, condensing decades into a single line to evoke a powerful sense of historical depth. Yet differences in cultural backgrounds, spiritual temperaments and creative motivations produce contrasting rhythms of temporal flow. Time in Su Shi's poems is highly fluid and variable, tied to his poetic belief in "naturalness". He argued that poetic creation gives expression to freely moving inner awareness and inspiration. In contrast, Natsume Sōseki adopts a relatively narrow set of temporal narrative strategies. Time proceeds slowly, and his verses are filled with extensive scenic depictions. This stems from the Zen inspiration and creative motives discussed above. His writing is largely a form of painstaking poetic meditation, bearing traces of imitation, and some imagery transitions appear less spontaneous. This is understandable, however; as a non-native speaker of classical Chinese, his achievement in Kanshi composition remains remarkable.

Both Su Shi and Natsume Sōseki turned to poetry for inward exploration, questioning the meaning of individual existence amid boundless cosmic time. Su Shi lived in the mid-Northern Song Dynasty, an era when intellectual priorities shifted from pursuit of external political merit to inner spiritual cultivation. Introspective self-exploration became a widespread spiritual pursuit. Artistically, Chinese poetic expression and craftsmanship had reached its peak in the Tang Dynasty. Therefore, Song poets directed greater efforts toward philosophical profundity to achieve literary breakthrough and innovation. Song prose and poetry carry less intense emotion than Tang works yet attain greater intellectual depth. This later fostered two divergent developmental tendencies in Chinese poetics: the "Tang-admiring" school, which prioritizes emotional expression, and the "Song-admiring" school, which emphasizes philosophical reflection. Such ideological shifts

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generated abundant philosophically laden poetry, making intellectual depth a defining hallmark of Song verse. Natsume Sōseki likewise used Kanshi for continuous inward inquiry and spiritual exploration, influenced by Zen ideas such as "the mind itself is Buddha, and Buddha-nature is inherent" and "liberation within the mundane world". He sought spiritual deliverance through inner contemplation. In their poems, Su Shi wrote in *In Response to Ziyou'sNostalgic Poem at Mianchi*, "What can human life be likened to? A wild swan treading on snow and mud. By chance it leaves claw prints in the mire; It flies away, regardless of east or west", voicing reflections on life's contingency and transience. In his final poem *Untitled (I)*, Natsume Sōseki wrote, "What lies amid green hills and clear waters? All under heaven arises from the unintentional workings of the universe". Human existence is merely a coincidence, an unintended outcome of heaven and earth. The self is so insignificant that its being verges on non-being. Both poems convey a tinge of nihilism and contemplation on the absurdity of life. Placing themselves within cosmic time and space, the two poets sensed human insignificance and the brevity of mortal life, and pondered the meaning of individual existence.

Deeply influenced by Zen thought, both infused Zen aesthetics into their poetry. In his novel *The Two Hermits*, Natsume Sōseki put words in his protagonist's mouth to compare poetic aesthetics between East and West: "Pain, anger, clamour and weeping cling to human existence. I have experienced them for thirty years and grown thoroughly weary. I cannot bear reliving such excitements repeatedly in novels. The poetry I love does not preach worldly sentiments. It is verse that abandons mortal desires and temporarily frees the mind from secular life. No great masterpiece depicts drama wholly detached from human emotion, and few novels transcend right and wrong. Such dramas and novels can never fully escape the world. Western poetry, in particular, is rooted in human affairs. Even so-called pure poetry cannot break free from this condition. (Omitted) 'I pick chrysanthemums beneath the eastern hedge; calmly I see the southern mountain.' Within these two lines lies a vision of complete forgetfulness of the mortal world. It is not written for a neighbour peeking over the wall, nor for relatives serving in the southern mountain. It embodies a transcendent, otherworldly state of mind, cleansed of gain and loss" [16]. This passage reveals Sōseki's admiration for the Zen ideal of detachment from secular entanglements. He also regarded Hanshan, the Tang Buddhist poet, as his idol. By comparison, while Su Shi was also deeply influenced by Buddhism and Zen, he absorbed Buddhist and Daoist ideas without sinking into nihilism and pessimism. This difference shapes the fundamental temperament of their poetry. Su Shi's verse rests on an optimistic and unrestrained foundation, whereas Natsume Sōseki's Kanshi carries a brooding melancholy born from unfulfilled pursuit of Dao. This distinction is reflected in their temporal narrative choices. Su Shi's time jumps freely between past and present, with constantly shifting duration and rhythm. His unrestrained composition mirrors his bold, open-minded inner world. In contrast, time in Natsume Sōseki's verses generally flows calmly forward, with little flashback or flashforward. Lengthy scene descriptions often render time nearly stagnant. His goal in writing Kanshi was to pursue spiritual enlightenment and quiet his mind amid external chaos, so time slows within his lines, embodying his longing for stillness, inner stagnation and faint sorrow. A supplementary illustration lies in their respective depictions of the moon imagery. Su Shi's moon is playful: "I fill a gourd with moonlight for my spring urn, scoop river glow to pour into night vials". Moonlight is portioned and stored in vessels, brimming with imaginative delight and uplifting sentiment. The Zen-infused moon in Su Shi's writing is translucent and luminous, empty yet not vacuous. "White cloud stretches like silk below the hill; bright moon floats like a pagoda upon the water" (*Written in Response to a Poem at Huanglou on the Fifteenth Day of the Tenth Lunar Month*). The moon images crafted by Su Shi evoke openness and ethereality. Natsume

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Sōseki's moon, however, appears in the line "Suddenly through the quiet window's pale void, the moon rises over Eastern Hill, illuminating half the river" (*Untitled (I)*). This moonlight carries stagnation, solitude and sorrow. As Wang Guangsheng interprets: "Consistent with the poet's unenlightened state and restless soul, it creates a dim, subtle atmosphere and artistic conception… the ethereal clarity of traditional Chinese Zen poetry blends with the gentle, mysterious aesthetic unique to Japanese literature" [13]. Though both poets drew upon Zen thought, their interpretations diverge, yielding distinct poetic flavours when weaving Zen into verse. Su Shi, broad-minded, portrays clear and translucent moonlight; the melancholy Natsume Sōseki depicts moonbeams imbued with quiet mystery and soft gloom.

Interestingly, both Su Shi and Natsume Sōseki regarded Tao Yuanming as their spiritual idol. In the *Epitaph for Mr. Dongpo*, Su Zhe wrote: "Su Shi's early poetry resembled Li Bai and Du Fu, yet in his later years he grew fond of Tao Yuanming." In his late life, Su Shi composed more than a hundred poems responding to Tao Yuanming's works, deeply admiring Tao's moral integrity and poetic artistry. Similarly, Natsume Sōseki wrote in one of his Chinese regulated poems: "Painting the west wind leaves my verse incomplete; I watch clouds and pick chrysanthemums by the eastern fence", explicitly expressing his admiration for Tao Yuanming. Both poets were influenced by Tao's pursuit of freedom from worldly bondage and transcendental equanimity.

Nevertheless, despite their shared skepticism toward mortal value, common exposure to Zen philosophy, and reverence for Tao Yuanming, Su Shi and Natsume Sōseki ultimately attained different artistic realms. This divergence can be interpreted through Wang Guowei's theory of poetic realms in *Ren Jian Ci Hua*. In his final poem *Untitled (I)*, Sōseki confesses: "Foolish in pursuit, my aspirations unfulfilled, / Fifty years fleeting in an instant. / Contemplating the Dao in silent stillness, / Crafting verses solely for pure serenity." These lines reveal that even in his final years, Sōseki still struggled in pursuit of the Dao without achieving thorough spiritual enlightenment. In *Grey Temples and Endless Sentiment*, the lines "Recluse in peace, content with my aged fox fur, / I seek plain hemp gowns and venture into town" carry layered symbolism. The "fox fur" represents worldly fame and official ambition, while the "hemp gown" stands for indifferent seclusion. The worn, dust-covered fox fur symbolizes the poet's self-reflection and negation of his youthful pursuit of secular merit. In old age, with greying temples, he recognizes the vanity of fame and longs for inner spiritual fulfillment, yet lingering regret and inability to fully reconcile with the past remain. As Wang Guangsheng argues, "Natsume Sōseki was never truly transcendent; he lacked the ethereal detachment of a sage" [13]. Consequently, his lifelong state was one of persistent searching rather than fulfilled enlightenment, corresponding exactly to Wang Guowei's second poetic realm: "My girdle loosens, yet I regret not; I pine and languish for her sake." Sōseki's Kanshi poetry is perpetually permeated with lingering melancholy, solitude and unresolved regret. In contrast, Su Shi attained thorough spiritual reconciliation in his late works. In *Self-Inscription at Jinshan Portrait*, he calmly summarizes his life: "Ask of my lifelong achievements: / Huangzhou, Huizhou, Danzhou." He had fully transcended the sufferings of his political exile. In *Crossing the Sea on the Twentieth Night of the Sixth Month*, he declares fearlessly: "Having narrowly escaped death in the southern wilderness, I bear no hatred; / This journey has been the most extraordinary of my life." Su Shi viewed his turbulent life as uniquely valuable, free of regret or unfulfilled longing. His final poem *Reply to Elder Lin of Jingshan Temple* further demonstrates his transcendence toward death: "Great afflictions arise from bodily existence; / Without form, there is no illness. / I have always laughed at Kumarajiva, / For chanting divine incantations in vain." Having overcome the fear of mortality, he embraced natural transformation with complete equanimity, reaching Wang Guowei's highest poetic

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realm: "I have searched for her a thousand times; suddenly I turn, and there she stands, in the dim light."

5. Conclusion

Eight hundred years apart in history, Su Shi and Natsume Sōseki both had a deep devotion to poetry. They both regarded Tao Yuanming as their spiritual model. They thought about the absurd nature of human existence in the infinite cosmos, and drew spiritual nourishment from Zen philosophy. But differences in life experiences, cultural traditions, historical backgrounds and inner temperaments gave their poems clearly distinct styles. This paper takes time perception and narrative methods as the starting point of analysis. It compares the poetic features of Su Shi and Natsume Sōseki. The research finds that Su Shi uses flexible and varied time-based narrative skills. These skills include reversed time order, rhythmic changes, the combination of time and space, and the omission of time details. He puts personal hardships, historical thoughts and philosophical ideas into his free-flowing time narration. This shows an open, transcendent and unrestrained spiritual state. On the other hand, Natsume Sōseki mainly uses linear time order in his poems. He prefers slow-paced scene description and steady, unchanging time rhythm. His calm, quiet and static time-based artistic style carries subtle thoughts of seeking Dao and hidden sadness. It represents the unique artistic temperament of modern Japanese Kanshi poetry. Both poets make the flow of time tangible through natural images. They rebuild physical time through their own inner psychological feelings. They both question the meaning of individual life from the perspective of the vast universe. Their works inherit the spiritual core of Zen and Tao Yuanming's thoughts. They show the common artistic rules of cross-cultural poetic studies. At the same time, differences in cultural context, inner character and writing motivation shape their different time narrative modes and artistic achievements. It is true that this study still has space for further development. For example, local changes of Zen culture in Japan and their influence on modern Japanese Kanshi need more systematic text-based verification. Further research can make cross-cultural comparative analysis deeper on this basis.

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