



Acculturation of Chinese Culture in Modern American Poetry

Hongju Zhang

Shandong Xiehe University, Jinan, Shandong, 250100, China

nancy1505@126.com

Abstract: In modern American poetry, the acculturation of Chinese culture elements is particularly remarkable. Influenced by Chinese culture, many American poets not only incorporated Chinese traditional philosophy into their poems, but also borrowed from Chinese classical poetry, which brought new vitality and inspiration to their creation. This phenomenon of acculturation not only enhances the artistic expression of modern American poetry, but also promotes the in-depth exchange and dialogue between Chinese and American cultures, which is more conducive to the spread of Chinese traditional culture abroad. In this regard, based on the perspective of modern American poetry, this paper deeply explores the acculturation of Chinese culture in modern American poetry, and focuses on the influence of the elements of Chinese culture on American literature from the representative works of modern American poetry, in order to understand the cultural connotation and value behind this phenomenon more comprehensively and deeply.

Keywords: Modern American poetry; Chinese culture; acculturation; Sino-American cultural exchange

1 Introduction

With the in-depth development of globalization, the increasingly frequent and in-depth exchanges and integration between different cultures have become an important trend in the development of world literature. Among them, as an important form of literature and art, poetry plays an important role in the process of cultural communication, exchange and integration with its unique rhythm, profound artistic conception and rich emotions. Especially in modern American poetry, we can easily find frequent references to various elements of Chinese culture. This remarkable phenomenon of acculturation not only shows American poets' strong interest and deep recognition of Chinese culture, but also highlights the vivid practice of cultural blending under the background of globalization. [1]

In the current specific historical period, the research on the acculturation of Chinese culture in modern American poetry has been given a new meaning and a new direction, which fully shows the academic value and practical significance behind it. Faced with this situation, the research enthusiasm of experts and scholars at home and

abroad continues to rise, and they try to broaden the research perspective and dimension with the help of new technical means such as data mining and visual display. At the same time, they also make the research goal more concrete, start with individual poets or single works, and make a more comprehensive and in-depth discussion. For example, Liu[2] explores the typical narrative fashion of Chinese landscape culture in American poetry circles in the middle of the 20th century, which shows the influence of Chinese traditional cultural elements on European and American literary thoughts and literary creation patterns. Cynthia Stamy[3] made an in-depth study of the relationship between Marianne Moore, a famous American poet, and Chinese culture in her own works, explaining the influence of cross-cultural communication on poetry creation and the development of American literature. Therefore, this study will make full use of literature search, theoretical discussion and other methods to make an in-depth study of the acculturation of Chinese culture in modern American poetry, and explore the essence and connotation of this phenomenon, so as to help us understand the complexity of cultural exchange more deeply and make a positive attempt to promote cultural innovation and integration between China and the United States.

2 Historical Background

Throughout the development history of modern American poetry, the acculturation of Chinese culture presents a gradual and in-depth process. The whole process has gone through more than a hundred years, during which it is full of the deepening exchange and integration of literature and culture between China and the United States.

In the first half of the sixteenth century, the United States was not yet established, and the North American continent was still a colonial territory of European countries. But at this time, China is in an important period of communication with the outside world, and the flourishing traditional culture of China has spread to Central Asia, West Asia and Europe through the Silk Road and maritime trade. Among them, European writers and translators, especially British scholars, began to devote themselves to the translation and introduction of Chinese classical poems. Although Chinese cultural elements were not directly introduced into American poetry during this period, the cross-cultural communication paved the way for later American poets to get in touch with and understand Chinese culture.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, with the frequent economic, political and cultural exchanges between the East and the West, many Chinese classical poems began to be widely spread to European and American countries in the form of translations, which provided valuable opportunities for British and American poets to deeply understand and learn Chinese classical poems. Through these translations, British and American poets can cross the language barrier, read and study Chinese classical poems substantially, and begin to actively learn the cultural elements and writing skills in Chinese poems, so as to broaden their creative horizons and enrich their artistic expressions. The communication during this period injected new vitality into the cultural integration and development between China and the United States, and laid a solid foundation for further cooperation.

Entering the 1920s, a period that coincided with the end of the First World War, the United States took the opportunity to show its great power to the world and establish closer exchanges and cooperation with Europe. This openness allowed American scholars to assimilate cultural trends from around the world, including European Symbolism, Surrealism, and Dadaism. In the United States, there was also a wave of "Imagism" movement. [4] Under this background, imagists began to actively draw on the elements of Chinese culture and skillfully integrate them into their poetry creation. Their efforts not only enriched the connotation and form of American poetry, but also further promoted the wide spread of Chinese culture in American poetry.

In the 1950s and 1960s, with the end of the Second World War, the "Anti Vietnam War", the "Black Movement" and the "Feminist Movement" successively broke out in the United States, prompting unprecedented intensification of social contradictions, and people's ideas began to distort and values became increasingly confused. [5] Against this background, the American poetry community ushered in the San Francisco Renaissance Movement, which injected new vitality and inspiration to the poets at that time, and began to reflect on and rebel against the traditional mainstream poetry, and actively seek new creative outlets. At this stage, they are no longer limited to Western cultural vision, but turn their eyes to the resources of non-Western culture, especially the unique charm and profound heritage of Chinese culture. This cross-cultural communication and integration has made the American poetry more closely connected with Chinese culture, and at the same time, it has shown a more diverse and inclusive tendency while maintaining its own characteristics.

3 Forms of Expression

Based on the above research background, the phenomenon of Chinese traditional cultural elements migrating in through Chinese classical poetry has a profound and lasting influence on American poets, and it has penetrated into the formal style, aesthetic standards and theme of modern American poetry. In this regard, this study will select the representative works of modern American poetry to elaborate and discuss the acculturation of Chinese traditional culture from the aspects of philosophical thinking, landscape images, and expression mode.

3.1 The Acculturation of Philosophical Thinking

The philosophical thoughts in Chinese traditional culture are concentrated in Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and their influences on Chinese classical poetry are diverse and profound, which are fully reflected in Du Fu's *Spring View*, Li Bai's *Invitation to Wine* and Wang Wei's *A Retreat at Zhongnan Mountains*. Similarly, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism have also left traces of migration in modern American poetry, which injected profound connotation into the creation of poetry, making these poems pay more attention to the pursuit of inner spirit and the understanding of the soul when expressing the relationship between man and nature and man and society.

Confucianism pays attention to people's moral cultivation and social responsibility. For example, the American poet Kenneth Rexroth(1905-1982) wrote *Hiking on the Coast Range* after attending the workers' strike in July 1934:

*"The blood alternately dark and brilliant
On the blue and white bandana pattern."* [6]

This poem actively reflects the social reality, expresses opposition to injustice and violence, and tries to awaken people's conscience and sense of justice through poetry, which truly shows that the poet's character lies not only in creation, but also in taking certain social responsibilities through his works.

Taoism emphasizes the harmony between man and nature, inaction and inner peace and tranquility. Such kind of thoughts are demonstrated when the American poet Robert Bly(1926-2021) described himself walking barefoot and enjoying the natural scenery in *A Doing Nothing Poem*, conveying a life attitude of going beyond worldly troubles and returning to nature and authenticity.

*"I have walked the ridge for hours
And looked at birds and flowers
And listened to the wind."*[7]

The whole poem is closely related to the thoughts of Taoism in terms of title and content. The poet depicts a concrete scene with far-reaching artistic conception through concise brushwork, which embodies Bly's profound understanding and unique interpretation of Taoism.

Buddhism emphasizes meditation and introspection in practice to gain insight into the true meaning of life. Analogously, the American poet Allen Ginsberg(1926-1997) directly expressed his thoughts on life and death and the essence of life in *Land O'Lakes, Wisc.*

*"Buddha died and
left behind a
big emptiness.."*[8]

The word "Buddha" in the poem refers to the practitioners of Buddhism, and after the Buddha left, all he left was endless emptiness. Similarly, everyone is the same, showing the true state of life in an empty environment. This coincides with the concepts of "emptiness" and "non-ego" in Buddhism.

3.2 The Acculturation of Landscape Images

The landscape images in Chinese poems, with their unique aesthetic value, have deeply attracted countless poets since ancient times. Starting from the school of pastoral poetry initiated by poets such as Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun, this style is unique in Chinese poetry and occupies a decisive position. With delicate brushstrokes, these poets integrated the beauty of mountains and rivers into their poems, showing the quietness, harmony and vitality of nature. When we turn our eyes to American modern poetry, we will find an interesting phenomenon: the landscape images in Chinese poems were skillfully migrated into their creations by American poets. This cross-cultural reference and integration not only enriches the picture sense of American poetry, but also adds a touch of oriental aesthetics to it.

Kenneth Rexroth's poem *Between the Hills* is a vivid example:

*"Between the hills I wander alone,
The peaks rise sharp, the streams run free,
The trees are green, the flowers are bright,
And here my heart finds peace.*

...

*Oh, the beauty of these hills and streams,
Words cannot express their worth,
I only wish to stay forever here,
With nature, my only guide."*[9]

This poem is a typical work written by Kenneth Rexroth with reference to Chinese pastoral style. In this poem, he used delicate brushstrokes to describe the tranquility and harmony between mountains and rivers. He used the common landscape images in Chinese poems for reference, and skillfully integrated mountains, rivers, green trees and other elements into his poems to construct a vivid picture. The awe and love for nature revealed in his poems is the expression of his deep influence on Chinese pastoral poems.

3.3 The Acculturation of Expression Mode

In modern American poetry, many poets were also deeply influenced by the modes of expression of Chinese classical poetry. They borrowed and innovated these techniques to combine them with the linguistic features of English poetry, so as to present a unique poetic style while maintaining the cultural characteristics of China.

For example, William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) made a great innovation in the form of expression in *The Red Wheelbarrow*, which made it closer to the arrangement of Chinese classical poems. At the same time, the subject "person" in the poem is superimposed with the objects "wheelbarrow" and "white chickens". Emotion is not directly reflected in the poem, but through the superposition of images and the creation of scenes, readers can experience and feel for themselves.

*"so much depends
Upon
A red wheel
Barrow
Glazed with rain water
Beside the white
Chickens"*[10]

To sum up, the acculturation of Chinese culture has had a far-reaching impact on modern American poetry. This influence is fully reflected in artistic expression, which makes American poetry more colorful in form and content. At the same time, this cultural exchange has also promoted cultural mutual learning between China and the United States and provided valuable reference for the cultural development of both sides.

4 Conclusion

As a unique existence in modern American poetry, the acculturation of Chinese culture has brought unprecedented innovation and change to the field of American poetry. This phenomenon is not only reflected in the profound influence of philosophy, but also in the ingenious use of landscape images and the unique innovation of expression. The profound cultural heritage of China provides American poets with rich creative materials and inspiration, which makes their works integrate oriental charm and philosophical thinking while maintaining their own characteristics. This cross-cultural communication and integration not only enriches the creative techniques and connotations of American poetry, but also promotes the in-depth dialogue and understanding between Chinese and American cultures. In the follow-up study, we will further explore the far-reaching influence of this acculturation on Sino-American cultural exchanges and make greater contributions to the common prosperity of Sino-American cultural exchanges and poetry art.

Acknowledgements

Shandong Social Science Planning Research Project,2021: On the Manifestation and Dissemination of Chinese Culture in American Poetry in the 1920s and 1930s,Project No.:21CPYJ49, Project Leader:Zhang Hongju

References

1. Jiang Tao. A Study on the Phenomenon of the Acculturation of Chinese Culture in Modern American Poetry[J]. Foreign Language Research.2011.05.155-158.
2. Yongqing Liu. Chinese Landscape Culture Narration in American Poetry in the Mid-20th Century[J]. Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities.2021.12.164-171.
3. Cynthia Stamy. Marianne Moore and China: Orientalism and a Writing of America[M].2023.10.
4. Zhu Hui. Fate of Chinese and American Poetry[M]. Cheng Du: Sichuan People's Publishing House.2001.
5. Zhong Ling. American Poetry and Chinese Dream: China Cultural Model in Modern American Poetry[M]. Gui Lin: Guangxi Normal University Press.2003.
6. Sam Hamill. The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth[M].Washington: Copper Canyon Press.2004.
7. Wang Wei. Elements of Chinese Classical Poetry in Robert Bly's Poems[D]. Hunan Institute of Science and Technology.2017.06.
8. Yang Jing. A Comparative Study of Walt Whitman and Irwin Allen Ginsberg's Poetics[D]. Hunan Normal University.2019.06.
9. Zhang Baohong. Poetic Features of Kenneth Rexroth's English Translation of Chinese Poetry[J]. Foreign Language Research in China.2019.01.92-141.
10. Wu Xiaomei. Analysis of Aesthetic Tendency in William Carlos Williams' Poems[J]. Journal of Taiyuan Urban Vocational College.2020.12.197-199.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

