

From French Symbolism to Chinese Symbolism: A Literary Influence

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“Perhaps the most global of all literary movements to date,”¹ Symbolism has continuously attracted the attention of scholars in Comparative Literature. Through the joint effort of scholars from various nationalities and cultural backgrounds, a comprehensive study of the movement, *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*, appeared in 1982. Since Symbolism is a “global” movement, one cannot help wondering why the scope of this project sponsored by the International Comparative Literature Association had not been broadened so as to include Asian Symbolist literature. A number of studies focusing on Chinese Symbolism have appeared in both Chinese and English in the last two decades;² however, most studies, if not all, focus more on the poets than their works. Few detailed analyses or close readings of Symbolist poems have ever appeared. The lack of a fuller understanding of individual works makes an evaluation of Symbolist aesthetic achievements difficult, causing disagreement among critics as to what place the Symbolist movement should hold in the history of Chinese literature.³ Inspired by French Symbolism, Chinese Symbolist poetry consequently calls for a comparative analysis based on both the Chinese and French poetic traditions. Through literary analysis I shall explore in this study some features of Chinese Symbolist poetry, linking them to French Symbolism. Because of limited space, the focus of this study will be on one poem from each of three major Chinese poets – poems that, in my opinion, best represent the poets’ styles.

Chinese Symbolism appeared in a milieu of uncertainty in the 1930s. Shortly before its appearance, two revolutions occurred – one political (1911), the other literary (1917). Having renounced a long-lived cultural tradition, many Chinese intellectuals, after these revolutions, turned to the West for inspiration. In the process of studying new cultures, a number of

writers became attracted by French Symbolist poetry. These Chinese intellectuals were able to identify with the voice of dejection and alienation in French works because they themselves felt alienated from their own tradition and society.

As is commonly acknowledged, the Chinese Symbolist movement started with the publication of three volumes of poetry by Li Chin-fa 李金髮 (1900-1976): *Light Rain* 微雨, in 1925, *Singing for Happiness* 爲幸福而歌, in 1926, and *Border and the Year of Famine* 食客與兇年, in 1927. Li went to France in 1919 at the age of 19, and all three poetic works were composed from 1920 until 1924, during his stay in France. As the poet recollected later, he was actually composing under the influence of French Symbolist poets:

At that time, because I often read humanist and leftist works, I gradually felt that too much evil existed in (human) society. I could not but form a disliking of this world and its ways. Slowly the works of decadence became an attraction to me. I often read Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Verlaine's poetry to the extent that I could not part with them. Thus I gradually became intoxicated with the Symbolist style.⁴

A brief look at the titles of Li's poems verifies the influence of French Symbolism on his writing. Like Baudelaire and Verlaine, he used "Spleen" as the title of one of his poems. Some of his other titles – "Tristesse" (Verlaine wrote "Ô triste, triste était mon âme"), "Néant" (Baudelaire wrote "Le Goût du néant"), "Death" (both Baudelaire and Verlaine wrote "La Mort"), and "The Boredom of Life" – indicate that the poet was equally interested in some of the common themes of Symbolism such as ennui, spleen, nothingness, and death. Not only does the influence of French Symbolism exist in his choice of topics, but it extends to his technique and use of imagery as well. An examination of the following poem, "Deserted Woman," a work reminiscent of the title of Baudelaire's poems, "Femmes damnées," substantiates this view.

Deserted Woman

Long hair falls in front of my eyes,
Blocking the intent gaze of all shame and hatred,
The gushing forth of fresh blood and the sound sleep
of dried bones.

Dark night and mosquitoes advance slowly and uniformly,
 Passing the corner of this short wall,
 And shouting behind my clean ears
 Like a fierce wind roaring furiously in a field:
 Making many wandering nomads tremble.

Through a blade of grass in an empty vale,
 I correspond with God's spirit.
 My sorrow can only sink deeply into the brain
 of a wandering bee;
 Or it tumbles down with the falls from a cliff
 Then disappears with red leaves.

The hidden sorrow of the deserted woman accumulates,
 slowing down her actions.
 The fire of the setting sun cannot turn the sorrow and
 the boredom of time
 Into ashes which fly through the chimney
 And dye the wings of wandering ravens,
 Together perching on rocks by the roaring sea,
 And listening quietly to the mariner's songs.

The aging hem of the skirt weeps,
 And wanders by the tomb; no hot tears will ever
 Drop on the meadow
 To serve as an ornament for this world.⁵

棄婦

長髮披徧我兩眼之前，
 遂隔斷了一切羞惡之疾視，
 與鮮血之急流，枯骨之沉睡。
 黑夜與蚊蟲聯步徐來，
 越此短牆之角，
 狂呼在我清白之耳後，
 如荒野狂風怒號，
 戰慄了無數遊牧。

靠一根草兒，與上帝之靈往返在空谷裏。
 我的哀戚惟遊蜂之腦能深印着；
 或與山泉長瀉在懸崖，
 然後隨紅葉而俱去。

棄婦之隱憂堆積在動作上，

夕陽之心不能把時間之煩悶
化成灰燼，從煙凸裏飛去，
長染在遊鴉之羽，
將同棲止於海嘯之石上，
靜聽舟子之歌。

衰老的裙裾發出哀吟，
徜徉在邱墓之側，
永無熱淚，
點滴在草地
爲世界之裝飾。

Shortly after the publication of *Light Rain* (1925), in which "Deserted Woman" appears, Li won the title, "the father of Chinese Symbolist poetry." Regardless of this title and the initial sensation created by his works, his poetry in China, even up until this day, has remained rather inscrutable to readers. Because of the absence of explicit links between his constantly changing images, critics in general believe that it is difficult to interpret his poems. I shall attempt, however, to make a sensible interpretation of "Deserted Woman."

As indicated by Li, this poem was written as a result of his discontent with social injustice. The "deserted woman" may symbolize the ostracized or the oppressed — a group with which the isolated poet could have identified himself.⁶ This poem is traditional in the sense that the poet, like so many Classical Chinese poets, adopts the mask of a woman to express his feelings. The diction and images used in the poem, however, as well as the sentiment and ideas expressed, are innovative. The poem opens with the image of a woman who uses her long hair as a shield to separate herself from the external world. Shame and hatred are presented as allegorical figures. Although no explicit links exist between the three images of "the intent gaze of all shame and hatred, / The gushing forth of fresh blood and the sound sleep of dried bones" (II. 2-3), together they seem to form a vision of persecution. Upon closer examination, one might even find three stages of persecution. "The intent gaze of all shame and hatred" may represent the initial stage of animosity; "the gushing forth of fresh blood" may signify the very act of persecution; and "the sound sleep of dried bones" may indicate the result of persecution.

The images of fresh blood and dried bones have indeed appeared in Classical Chinese poetry before; however, they were usually used as a

realistic representation of the catastrophe of war and famine. Unlike classical poets, Li endows the skeleton with a life of its own, using it to symbolize a person's experience of persecution. This technique is somewhat similar to that used at the end of Baudelaire's "Spleen," where the speaker envisions a funeral for his spiritual death: "Et de longs corbillards, sans tambours ni musique, / Défilent lentement dans mon âme (And hearses in files, without drum or music, / Advance slowly in my soul)" (II. 17-18). In a state of despair, the speaker in Baudelaire's poem describes himself in terms of a skull, bowing before Anguish, an allegorical figure: "l'Espoir, / Vaincu, pleure, et l'Angoisse atroce, despotique, / Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir (Hope / Conquered, cries, and the atrocious despotic Anguish, / Plants his black flag on my bowing skull)" (II. 18-20). Although both Li and Baudelaire use similar rhetorical devices and images to represent one's suffering, Li describes persecution as coming mainly from the exterior world, while Baudelaire portrays a struggle essentially within the psyche.

In the latter part of the first stanza of "Deserted Woman," the motif of persecution is represented again through the use of various images. Symbolized by the dark night and mosquitoes in the fourth line, the persecutors now appear. The short wall in the fifth line may be regarded, in this light, as a transformed image of the woman's long hair (since the latter image functions as a blockade, separating her from the exterior world). Despite the measures the woman takes to guard herself, the persecutors now circle around the short wall and shout behind her "clean ears," an image that suggests her innocence. The advancing and shouting of the persecutors in the dark night, along with the mosquitoes, are symbolic rather than realistic. In the seventh line, this symbolic shouting is associated with the furious roar of the wind. Just as the sound of the night and mosquitos can be compared to the roar of the wind, so the woman can be compared to a wandering nomad, trembling in the midst of the wind.

Driven by desperation in the second stanza, the woman attempts to find a shelter in God. However, the means through which she attempts to communicate with the spirit of God appears rather tenuous, as "through a blade of grass." The term "empty vale" is frequently used in Classical Chinese poetry with the Buddhist connotation that the essence of this world is emptiness. This image is also reminiscent of the symbol "gouffre (gulf)," or "abîme (abyss)," used constantly by Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs du Mal*: "Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe? (Plunge to the bottom of the gulf, Hell or Heaven, does it matter?)" ("Le Voyage," I. 143).

In Baudelaire's poetry, the image "gouffre," or "abîme," refers not only to the exterior world but also to the interior mind: "... Je sens s'élargir dans mon être / Un abîme béant; ce abîme est mon coeur (I feel there grows in me / A yawning abyss; this abyss is my heart)" ("Femmes damnées" II. 75-76). Blending both Classical Chinese and French Symbolist traditions, Li employs the image of an "empty valley" to represent the woman's vision of the world around her and of herself. In a world of isolation, the deserted woman simply has nothing to cling to for comfort, and as expressed in the second line, she can only identify herself with a wandering bee. But even this little understanding she thinks she shares with the bee disappears in the next line. The only alternative she can find is in the process of nature — namely, death: "Or it tumbles down with the falls from a cliff / Then disappears with red leaves."

Although the first two stanzas are in a woman's voice, a new voice appears in the third.⁷ Also in this stanza, for the first time in the poem, the woman shows actual movement. Her actions, however, are weighed down by her increasing "hidden sorrow." The use of "hidden" implies that the woman now keeps her sorrow within herself, without soliciting anyone's sympathy. The setting sun in the next line may represent the approach of her old age, a connection that becomes even more clear in the seventh and eighth lines of the stanza. Despite the passage of time, her sorrow remains and never disappears: "The fire of the setting sun cannot turn the sorrow and the boredom of time / Into ashes which fly through the chimney / And dye the wings of ravens. . . ."

The themes of sorrow and boredom appear frequently in the poetry of Baudelaire and Verlaine as well. For example, at the end of the preface to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the reader's attention is particularly drawn to "ennui":

Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde!
 Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grands gestes ni grands cris,
 Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris
 Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde;
 C'est l'Ennui! — l'oeil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,
 Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.
 Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,
 — Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère!
 ("Préface," 11. 33-40)

(There's one more hideous, evil, obscene!
 Though it makes no great gesture, no great cry,

It would lay waste the earth quite willingly,
And in a yawn engulf creation.

Boredom! Its eyes with tears unwilling shine,
It dreams of scaffolds, smoking its cheroot.
Reader, you know this monster delicate,
— Double-faced reader, — kinsman, — brother mine!)⁸

Here, "ennui", as elsewhere in Baudelaire's poetry, takes on a metaphysical connotation: "Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde." Like Baudelaire, Verlaine uses "ennui" frequently in his poetry: "Pour un coeur qui s'ennuie, / O le chant de la pluie!" ("For a heart dulled with pain, / oh, the song of the rain!").⁹ Differences exist, however, in their use of the theme of boredom. Li makes it clear in his "Deserted Woman" that boredom is the result of the woman's frustration; Baudelaire, and to some extent, Verlaine, tends to treat it as a mystical condition of human beings from which there is no escape ("Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde") and for which there is no reason ("Ce deuil est sans raison" "This grief is without reason").

Although the symbols Li uses constantly change, there is a unity among them. In one way or another, all the images ("fresh blood," "dried bones," "dark night," "mosquitoes," "fierce wind," "wandering nomads," "empty vale," "wandering bee," "falls," "red leaves," "setting sun," "ashes," "wandering ravens," "roaring sea," "aging hem," and "tomb") signify the despairing vision of the deserted woman. The unity of images exists not only at the thematic level but also at a linguistic level. In each of the three stanzas, the speaker applies the same word — "wandering" — to nomads, the bee, and ravens, thereby implying the wandering state of the woman. Moreover, a sharp contrast exists between the fierce wind and the trembling nomad in the first stanza; between the falls and the bee/red leaves in the second stanza; and between the roaring sea and the ravens/ashes in the third. Through the continuous use of sharp contrasts between an overwhelming force and a relatively small object, the woman's helplessness under an overpowering hostile force is thus greatly emphasized — hence, the note of death at the end of the poem. By using the term "together" in the fifth line of the third stanza, the speaker not only associates the woman with the ravens, but also identifies with the woman himself. As the poem closes, the aging woman prepares to meet the end of her life: "The aging hem of the skirt weeps, / And wanders by the tomb. . . ." Even at the moment approaching her death, she refuses to display her sorrow

in order that she may die with dignity: "No hot tears will ever / Drop on the meadow / To serve as an ornament for this world."

According to Chu Tzù-ch'ing,¹⁰ Li's use of symbols to signify ideas and emotions without explicitly developing relationships between those symbols is typical of Symbolist poetry. The following passage from the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* concerning the nature of Symbolist poetry equally applies to the works of Li:

Symbolist poetry is a poetry of indirection, in which objects tend to be suggested rather than named, or to be used primarily for an evocation of mood. Ideas may be important, but are characteristically presented obliquely through a variety of symbols and must be apprehended largely by intuition and feeling.¹¹

As will be shown later, Li's technique of presenting his ideas "obliquely through a variety of symbols" can actually be traced to Baudelaire.

Wang Tu-ch'ing 王獨清 (1898-1940), who went to France at about the same time as Li, also started composing poetry under the influence of French Symbolists. According to Wang, of all the French Symbolist poets, Verlaine had the greatest influence on him: "I like to read the kind of poetry written by Verlaine, such as 'Chansons d'automne.' I think they are the best works that one can compose, a harmonious rhythm using only a few words."¹² Wang cited "I Came Out of a Café" as one of his works influenced by Verlaine.

I Came Out of a Café

I came out of a café;
My body filled with
Drunken
Fatigue;
I did not know
Where to go
To find my temporary home. . .
Oh! Cold and quiet street,
Sunset, and light rain!

I came out of a café;
Drunken,
Speechless
I walked alone;

In my heart,
 I felt the sorrow of a wanderer
 Who is going to lose his homeland. . .
 Oh! Cold and quiet street,
 Sunset, and light rain!

我從 Café 中出來

我從 Café 中出來
 身上添了
 中酒的
 疲乏，
 我不知道
 向那一處走去，纔是我底
 暫時的住家……
 啊，冷靜的街衢，
 黃昏，細雨！

我從 Café 中出來
 在帶着醉
 無言地
 獨走，
 我底心內
 感着一種，要失了故國的
 浪人底哀愁……
 啊，冷靜的街衢，
 黃昏，細雨！

Unlike Li, Wang advocated the motto in Verlaine's "Art Poétique": "De la musique avant toute chose" ("Music comes before all things"). In his commentary on "I Came Out of a Café," Wang himself explains how he was careful to use rhymes to achieve a musical effect.¹³ Ironically, what the poet thought he had learned from Verlaine concerning the composition of poetry – that is, the importance of musicality – had always been one of the dominant features in classical Chinese poetry.

The influence of French Symbolists on Wang does not lie merely in music; it also appears in his use of themes and symbols. Like Li's "Deserted Woman," Wang's poem is about a figure who is alienated from his own society. On the surface the poem is about a drunk wanderer who is unable to find his home; the symbolic level of the poem, however, represents a sense of homelessness experienced by many contemporary Chinese

intellectuals who could not identify themselves with any tradition, Chinese or Western. In the original text, the word "café" was written in French to indicate a foreign location. As a place of temporary relaxation, the café assumes a symbolic significance of the French cultural tradition the speaker seeks. The speaker's trip to the café and journey to France only makes him realize that he is losing his home.

In the first stanza, he speaks of his home as a temporary one: "I did not know / Where to go / To find my temporary home." At the corresponding place in the second stanza, the symbolic meaning of home becomes even clearer since it now refers to his homeland: "In my heart, / I felt the sorrow of a wanderer / Who is going to lose his homeland." The fact that the Chinese character for "home" in the first stanza is "jia," which means "family" or "house," and the character for "home" in the second stanza is "guo," meaning "country," leaves little ambiguity that the feeling of homelessness has intensified. As Baudelaire uses the magnificent image of cities bathed in the setting sun in "Le Voyage" to describe the promising grandeur of the journey ("La gloire des cités dans le soleil couchant, / Allumaient dans nos coeurs une ardeur inquiète / De plonger dans un ciel au reflet alléchant" "Cities resplendent in the setting sun, / Lit in our hearts a wild anxiety / To plunge in heaven's sweet reflection"),¹⁴ so Wang implies the significant nature of his voyage through a similar image.

Like the café in Wang's poem, the images of "cold and quiet street," "sunset," and "light rain" also assume a symbolic meaning. Beyond a description of a street in a French city, "cold and quiet street" may refer to the speaker's spiritual journey. Besides grandeur, the scenery of the sunset may also indicate the end of this journey. In his spiritual quest for identity, he sees a dim future, and hence cries in despair. That the rain is more of a mental picture than an actual scene can be seen more clearly in Verlaine's poem: "Il pleure dans mon coeur / Comme il pleut sur la ville"¹⁵ ("It cries in my heart / As it rains in the city"). By juxtaposing these three images, Wang has effectively presented his mental landscape in the manner of a Symbolist poet.

The image of rain is conventional in French Symbolist poetry. Verlaine was actually following Baudelaire in using this image to represent one's inner mood. Commonly regarded as the vanguard of the French Symbolist school, Baudelaire had already used the image of rain as a symbol in the poem "Spleen":

Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle
 Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis,
 Et que de l'horizon embrassant tout le cercle
 Il nous verse un jour noir plus triste que les nuits;

Quand la terre est changée en un cachot humide,
 Où l'Espérance, comme une chauve-souris,
 S'en va battant les murs de son aile timide
 Et se cognant la tête à des plafonds pourris;

Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses traînées
 D'une vaste prison imite les barreaux,
 Et qu'un peuple muet d'infâmes araignées
 Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux,

Des cloches tout à coup sautent avec furie
 Et lancent vers le ciel un affreux hurlement,
 Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie
 Qui se mettent à geindre opiniâtrement.

— Et de longs corbillards, sans tambours ni musique,
 Défilent lentement dans mon âme; l'Espoir,
 Vaincu, pleure, et l'Angoisse atroce, despotique,
 Sur mon crâne incliné plants son drapeau noir.¹⁶

(When, like a lid, the low and heavy sky
 Weighs on the spirit burdened with long care,
 And when, as far as mortal eye can see,
 It sheds a darkness sadder than nights are;

When earth is changed into a prison cell,
 Where, in the damp and dark, with timid wing
 Hope, like a bat, goes beating at the wall,
 Striking its head on ceilings mouldering;

When rain spreads out its never-ending trails
 And imitates the bars of prisons vast,
 And spiders, silent and detestable,
 Crowd in, our minds with webs to overcast,

Some bells burst out in fury, suddenly,
 And hurl a roar most terrible to heaven,
 Like spirits lost for all eternity
 Who start, most obstinately, to complain.

And, without drums or music, funerals
 File past, in slow procession, in my soul;
 Hope weeps, defeated; Pain, tyrannical,
 Atrocious, plants its black flag on my skull.)¹⁷

This is one of his four poems entitled "Spleen," which Erich Auerbach well explicates in his *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*.¹⁸ I have chosen this representative poem of Baudelaire's to show how a natural landscape is used to symbolize the speaker's mental state and how different symbols are used to signify the same emotion and idea. The poem opens with a cloudy sky, described as closing in on and weighing down the speaker, a long-term victim of his own ennui: "Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle / Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis." The link between the exterior landscape and the interior mental state — the sky and the speaker — soon becomes clear in the fourth line. By rhyming "nuits (nights)" with "ennuis (boredom)," the speaker implies that his somber mood is like a dark day, "un jour noir plus triste que les nuits." The darkness of day thus foreshadows the black flag planted on the speaker's skull by "Agony," an allegorical figure, in the last stanza: "l'Angoisse atroce, despotique, / Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir." That darkness normally assumes a symbolic significance in Baudelaire's poetry can be seen in "Obsession," where the dark color is associated with void: "Je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu!" ("I seek the void, the dark and the bare") (I. 11).

Auerbach states that "the three stanzas introduced by *quand* present a heavy silence" (*Scenes*, p. 204). However, as indicated in the second line of the first stanza, the speaker is groaning (*gémissant*) under ennui. This groaning correlates with the whining at the end of the poem: "Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie / Qui se mettent à geindre opiniâtrement." Even in the second stanza, where hope is compared to a bat beating its wings against the humid wall and knocking its head against the rotten ceiling of a dungeon, silence is not quite present: "Qu'à l'Espérance, comme une chauve-souris, / S'en va battant les murs de son aile timide / Et se cognant la tête à des plafonds pourris." Noise would also be expected when the rain pours down as hard as the bars of a prison, as described in the third stanza. What concerns us most in this stanza, however, is Baudelaire's use of the image of rain. In keeping with many other images in this poem, the rain in the center of the poem presages the tears at the end: "l'Espoir /

Vaincu pleure. . . .” By rhyming “l’Espoir (Hope)” with “noir (dark),” the speaker once again associates his somber mood with a dark color, a link that refers back to the beginning of the poem. The concluding image in this poem resembles the end of an earlier poem of Baudelaire’s, “A une Madone,” where the seven deadly sins are mentioned:

Volupté noire! des sept Péchés capitaux,
 Bourreau plein de remords, je ferai sept Couteaux
 Bien affilés, et, comme un jongleur insensible,
 Prenant le plus profond de ton amour pour cible,
 Je les planterai tous dans ton Coeur pantelant,
 Dans ton Coeur sanglotant, dans ton Coeur ruisselant!

(O sombre ravishment! I shall the seven deadly Sins,
 Remorseful torturer, turn into seven javelins
 Well honed and sharpened, and—a juggler skilled and passionless—
 I shall take aim, and make my target all your love’s largesse,
 And I shall plant each one of them where you most feel the hurt,
 Within your sobbing, breaking Heart, within your streaming
 Heart.)¹⁹

Viewed in light of Baudelaire’s early poetry, the black flag at the end of “Spleen” may thus symbolize the speaker’s dark sin. Like the wanderer in “I Came Out of a Café,” the speaker in this poem also describes himself as a wandering spirit without a home or country: “Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie.”

In presenting a vision of despair, Baudelaire uses a variety of symbols (“nuits,” “cachot humide,” “chauve-souris,” “pluie,” “prison,” “corbillards,” “drapeau noir,” and “crâne”), which constantly change as the poem proceeds. “The data are of so little importance,” states Erich Auerbach, “that the symbols can be changed without loss.”²⁰ This symbolic representation inevitably links “Spleen” with “Deserted Woman,” since the latter is also characterized by such a style. It therefore comes as no surprise that Li might have derived this technique from Baudelaire, whose works he greatly admired.

In studying Symbolism, one sees not only the same style of symbolic representation but also the recurrence of identical images. For example, the image of rain found favor with both the French and Chinese Symbolists.²¹ Along with Li Chin-fa and Wang Tu-ch’ing, Tai Wang-shu 戴望舒 (1905-1950) also used the image of rain. Unlike Li and Wang, Tai was already familiar

with French Symbolist poetry before his trip to France, from 1932 to 1934. Tai's attraction to French Symbolist poetry started during his college years when he studied French at Aurora University in Shanghai. Partly because of his training and partly because of his talent, Tai is commonly considered a better poet than Li and Wang. In "Rainy Alley," where the image of rain appears throughout the entire poem, one sees a master hand at work:

Rainy Alley

Holding an oil-paper umbrella, I alone
Wander in the long, long
And lonely rainy alley;
I hope to encounter
A lilac-like
Girl who bears sorrow and grief.

Indeed she has
Lilac-like color
Lilac-like fragrance
Lilac-like sorrow.
Lamenting in the rain,
She laments and wanders.

She wanders in this lonely rainy alley,
Holding an oil-paper umbrella.
Like me,
Just like me,
She wanders silently –
Cold and indifferent, sad and chilled, lost and confused.

Silently she approaches
Approaching, she casts
A sigh-like glance;
She drifts by.
Like a dream
Like a dream, sad and obscure.

As in a dream
A sprig of lilac drifting by,
The girl drifts by me:
Silently, she roams farther and farther
To the fallen fences
And to the end of the rainy alley.

In the sad song of rain,
 Her color disappears,
 Her fragrance dissipates.
 All disappear, even her
 Sigh-like glances
 And her fragrance-like sadness.

Holding an oil-paper umbrella, I alone
 Wander in the long, long
 And lonely rainy alley;
 I hope there drifted by
 A lilac-like
 Girl who bears sorrow and grief.²²

雨巷

撐着油紙傘，獨自
 彷徨在悠長，悠長，
 又寂寥的雨巷，
 我希望逢着
 一個丁香一樣地
 結着愁怨的姑娘。

她是
 丁香一樣的顏色，
 丁香一樣的芬芳，
 丁香一樣的憂愁，
 在雨中哀怨，
 哀怨又彷徨；

她彷徨在這寂寥的雨巷，
 撐着油紙傘
 像我一樣，
 像我一樣地
 默默行着，
 冷漠，淒清，又惆悵。

她靜默地走近
 走近，又投出
 太息一般的眼光，
 她飄過
 像夢一般地，
 像夢一般地淒婉迷茫。

像夢中飄過
 一枝丁香地，
 我身旁飄過這女郎；
 她靜默地遠了，遠了，
 到了頹圯的籬牆，
 走盡這雨巷。

在雨的哀曲裏，
 消了她的顏色，
 散了她的芬芳，
 消散了，甚至她的
 太息般的眼光，
 她丁香般的惆悵。

撐着油紙傘，獨自
 彷徨在悠長，悠長
 又寂寥的雨巷，
 我希望飄過
 一個丁香一樣地
 結着愁怨的姑娘。

The publication of this poem made Tai famous overnight, and he became known as "The poet of Rainy Alley."²³ In terms of style, this poem is reminiscent of Verlaine's "Voeu" ("Wish") and "L'Allée" ("The Alley"), two short poems concerned mainly with women. For example, the descriptions of the mistresses in the first stanza of "Voeu," based on the different attributes of the female figure, bear a resemblance to the second and penultimate stanzas of "Rainy Alley": "L'or des cheveux, l'azur des yeux, la fleur des chairs, / Et puis, parmi l'odeur des corps jeunes et chers, / La spontanéité craintive des caresses!" ("The golden hair, blue eyes, the flowering flesh, / and then, in the fragrance of bodies young and fresh, / the timorous spontaneity of caresses!").²⁴ In both poems the attributes are equally organized in terms of human senses: sight (L'or des cheveux, l'azur des yeux, Lilac-like color), smell (l'odeur, fragrance), hearing (sigh), and touch (caresses). The speaker's sad feelings described in the third stanza of "Voeu" are again similar to the sentiments shared by both the speaker and the woman in the third stanza of "Rainy Alley": "Si que me voilà seul à présent, morne et seul, / Morne et désespéré. . ." ("Now I am here alone, sad and despised, / mournful and helpless. . ."). In "L'Allée," which has the same key word as "Rainy Alley," a similarity exists in the speaker's

delineation of the woman's movement: "Elle passe, sous les ramures assombries, / Dans l'allée où verdit la mousse des vieux bancs, / Avec mille facons et mille afféteries" ("she passes, underneath the somber branches, / along the walk with ancient moss-grown benches; the thousand coqueties that she displays. . ."). Furthermore, some dilapidated objects — old, moss-covered benches and "fallen fences" — appear in both alleys where the female figures pass. Even though Tai did not say why he chose a lilac particularly as an analogy for the girl, one may perhaps say, based on the details of the woman's robe in Verlaine's "L'Allée," that the girl's dress is of a color comparable to lilac: "Sa longue robe à queue est bleue" ("Her long-trained robe is blue"). Notwithstanding these similarities, there are differences as well. Unlike "Voeu" and "L'Allée," which provide a rather detailed portrait of the female figures ("à maint détail" L'Allée, I. 10), "Rainy Alley" presents a somewhat abstract and ambiguous image of a girl, leaving details to one's imagination. As will be shown later in "Rainy Alley," Tai was interested not so much in the girl herself as in what she represented. Whereas Verlaine expressed his wish in "Voeu" to recapture his past experiences with his beloved women, Tai had a different purpose.

According to Tu Hêng 杜衡, who, along with Tai, co-edited the journal *Les Contemporains*, Tai experimented with the qualities of music in modern Chinese verse at this point in his career. In his preface to *The Draft of Wang-shu*, written at the request of Tai, Tu Hêng says: "He pursued the beauty of rhythm and endeavored to endow modern verse with the same chanting quality as in classical poetry."²⁵ The prosody of "Rainy Alley" thus deserves detailed analysis. In keeping with Classical Chinese and Symbolist poetic traditions, "Rainy Alley" is particularly rich in its musical effect. At the end of every three lines, the poet uses the rhyme "ang." Even in the middle of some stanzas, "ang" remains a dominant sound. For example, out of the seven syllables in the second line of the first stanza, there are four syllables containing the sound "ang": "P'ang huang tsai yu ch'ang, yu ch'ang." Besides "ang," the sound "i" also appears often in the poem as an internal rhyme. For example, out of the seven syllables in the second line of the second stanza, five contain the sound "i": "Ting hsiang yi yang tê yen sé."²⁶ To strengthen the sound effect, the poet uses many compounds composed of similar sounds, such as "chi-liao" "ch'ih ch'u," "ch'i ch'ing," "ch'ou ch'ang," "mi mang," "li ch'iang," and "fên fang." Because of this successful use of alliteration, assonance, and rhyme, the poem assumes a musical quality. Interestingly, the poet's choice of

the rhyme "ang" or "i-ang" may be associated with the Chinese phrase "k'êng ch'iang," an onomatopoeia for music.

The prosody of "Rainy Alley", says Yeh Shêng-t'ao 葉聖陶, marks a new era in the history of modern Chinese verse. Tai ceased to emphasize the musical aspect of poetry in the second stage of his career when he composed the poems in *The Draft of Wang-shu*. In the third stage of his career, however, when he wrote *The Years of Calamity* 災難的歲月, he re-emphasized the quality of music.²⁷ Without a clear notion of the development of Tai's poetic style, some critics²⁸ mistakenly interpreted "Rainy Alley," a work of his first stage, in terms of the credo Tai followed in his second stage: "Poetry should not rely upon music; it should be without the element of music."²⁹ "Rainy Alley" has been composed long before Tai created this credo, which reflects his second state. As shown by his own poetry as well as his colleague's remarks in the initial stage of his career, Tai was obviously an avid follower of Verlaine: "De la musique encore et toujours!" ("Let there be music, again and always!") ("Art Poétique," I. 29)

Before further analyzing this poem, I think it is better for me to cite a different translation of the last stanza by Julia Lin, which reads as follows:

Holding an oil-paper umbrella, Alone,
Wandering in the long, long desolate alley
In the rain,
I hope to encounter
The girl who holds her grief like cloves.³⁰

The greatest difference between Julia Lin's translation and my translation of this stanza that is relevant to my argument lies in our different choices of verbs and their tenses. As Lin reads it, the last stanza is simply a repetition of the first. In the original text, the opening and closing stanzas are exactly the same except for the differences in the use of the verbs and their tenses. In the fourth line of the first stanza, the poet uses the verb "fêng" (to encounter) with "chê," a particle that indicates the progressive state of an act. At the corresponding place in the last stanza, the verb "piao" (to drift) appears with "kuo," a particle signifying past experience.³¹

The meaning of the poem depends, to a great extent, on the differentiation between these two stanzas. Because of Lin's translation, some readers³² have thought that the poem ends where it begins. The poem, however, does not end where it begins. To substantiate this statement, I first pose a

question: Has the speaker or the poet encountered the girl? At the center of the poem, the speaker tells us that "she drifts by"; at the end, however, the statement is no longer quite certain: "I hope there drifted by / A lilac-like / Girl. . . ." The statement of uncertainty at the end of the poem appears all the more odd after one realizes that the entire poem, except for the first and last stanzas, is devoted to the description of the girl's attributes, appearance, and disappearance. The resolution of the seemingly contradictory statements made by the speaker lies in the symbolic significance the girl assumes in the poem. In the second stanza the speaker describes her as an embodiment of the beauty of color and fragrance, whose emotion is characterized by sadness: "Lilac-like color / Lilac-like fragrance / Lilac-like sorrow." What is most unusual about the girl is that her appearance and disappearance coincide with the movement of the poem. In the first stanza, the speaker expresses his wish to meet the girl of his imagination. In the second stanza, she begins to appear with all the attributes that he has imagined. Her beauty appeals to various senses, which interplay with one another.³³ In the third stanza, the speaker describes the girl's movement, which resembles his own: "Like me, / Just like me, / She wanders silently." In the fourth stanza, the girl's movement is described in opposite terms — forwards and backwards. In the first half of the fourth stanza, the girl moves closer and closer; in the second half, she moves away. The turning point occurs exactly in the center of the poem, the blank space between the third and fourth lines. Symmetrically corresponding to the third stanza, the fifth stanza again concerns the movement of the girl, the difference being that she moves farther and farther away. As the poem proceeds to the penultimate stanza, the girl disappears. Correlating with the second stanza, this stanza again concerns her attributes. In the former stanza, the attributes emerge; in the latter, they vanish. As the poem closes, the speaker circles back to the beginning of the poem but with a different wish, that he has indeed encountered the girl.

Because of the close relation between the movement of the girl and that of the poem, one suspects that the girl may represent the poem. This interpretation becomes even more likely since the girl appears and disappears "as if in a dream" (i.e. in the speaker's or the poet's imagination). Having reached this conclusion, I may now answer the question posed earlier. That is, has the poet encountered the girl? In the sense that the girl is only a figure of the speaker's imagination, he has not realistically encountered her. However, in the sense that the girl represents the poem itself, he has indeed

encountered her.

Viewed in this light, the encounter between the speaker and the girl is essentially an illustration of the poet's creative process. In the first stanza, the poet indicates his wish to create a poem, which resembles the beauty of a girl who has the qualities of a lilac. In the second stanza, the poet visualizes in concrete terms the nature of his poem, which is characterized by synaesthesia, a feature of Symbolist poetry. In the third stanza, the poet signifies the movement of his poem through his identification with the girl: "Like me, / Just like me." In the fourth stanza, where the center of the poem is located, the girl approaches closer and closer. The poem, as well, moves closer and closer to its climax. Once the girl passes the center of the poem and the climax has been reached, in the fifth stanza, the poet is thinking of how to close his poem in terms of her movement: "Silently, she roams farther and farther / To the fallen fences / And to the end of the rainy alley." The image of "fallen fences," an emblem of decadence, not only indicates the beginning of the deconstruction process of the poem but also suggests the poem's decadent nature, equally characterizing French Symbolist poetry. As the poem approaches its end, all of her attributes disappear and the characteristics of the poem are thus symbolically unraveled. When the poem finally reaches its end, the speaker indicates with modesty the wish that he has successfully composed a symbolist poem of his original intent: "I hope there drifted by / A lilac-like / Girl who bears sorrow and grief."

"In *Symbolisme* the word does not echo the thing but other words," writes Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, and "hence the immediate impact *symbolisme* makes on the reader is that of incantation, a harmony of sounds and a sense of a growing richness of meaning unlimited by denotation" (p. 80). According to Frye, the emphasis on the process of imaginative creation by treating "literature as centripetal verbal pattern" is one of the dominant features of Symbolist poetry. The subordination of the "assertive" to the "hypothetical" elements in literature is a relatively recent achievement by Symbolist poets. In China, the "treatment of literature as centripetal verbal pattern" is an even more recent development. Without the influence of French Symbolist poets, Tai Wang-shu would not have been able to create this new stage in Chinese literature.

The above study shows the affinity between Chinese and French Symbolism. As has been shown, Baudelaire and Verlaine were the two most influential poets in the formation of Chinese Symbolist poetry. In

their process of creation, Chinese poets often, consciously or unconsciously, blended Western and Chinese traditions. In seeking inspiration from the West, however, Chinese Symbolist poets did not explore the theological dimension of French Symbolist works. Based on the study of the poems above, a sharp distinction in this regard can be made between these two symbolist traditions. Whereas the theological significance of the sinful part of human nature is constantly explored in French Symbolist poetry³⁴ – for example, the motif of ennui – socio-ethical relations are more often the major concern of the Chinese poets. “The Symbolists, beginning with Baudelaire, believe in the fall of man,” states René Wellek in *Further Concepts of Criticism*,³⁵ the opposite can be said of Chinese Symbolists. Li himself made it clear that he started composing poetry in France mainly because he was discontent with social evil rather than with the dark force within oneself. In his “Deserted Woman,” he mentions God once only to exclude the possibility of any communication between the human and the divine. Like Baudelaire and Verlaine, Li used the word “boredom”; the term in Li’s poetry is devoid of any theological meaning. Wang’s distress in “I Came Out of a Café” is obviously derived from the severing of all social ties and conventions. Once these poets returned home and were again rooted in their own society, their poetic careers actually ceased. Even Tai, who among all the Chinese Symbolist poets was closest in his style of writing to the French Symbolists, expressed his theme of alienation mainly in mundane terms in “Rainy Alley.” Years later, when he explored the theme again in “White Butterfly,” his perspective remained the same:

What wisdom do you give me
 Small and white butterfly,
 Opening the blank pages,
 Closing the blank pages?

On the opened pages –
 Loneliness;
 On the closed pages –
 Loneliness.

Through a butterfly, Tai fuses the images of nature, culture, and the self,³⁶ thereby expressing the view that everything in this world signifies “loneliness” – a view that hardly suggests transcendental concepts. This difference between French and Chinese Symbolism is actually that of the cultural

context in which the poetic works were written. Whereas the Judeo-Christian tradition was an essential part of the heritage of nineteenth-century Europe, it has remained rather foreign to China even up until today. Because of this difference, Chinese Symbolism, though inspired and influenced by French Symbolism, remains essentially a reflection of Chinese thought and understanding.

The detailed analysis of the poems in this study not only makes one aware of the significance of each work but also enables one to see the actual influence of French Symbolism in the use of technique, imagery, and theme. Based on a deeper understanding of the individual works, a more objective evaluation of the aesthetic achievements of Chinese Symbolist poetry may thus be made. By studying both the similarities and differences between Chinese and French Symbolism, one would not only see the unity but also the diversity in this literary movement. Based on a thorough knowledge of Symbolist poetry in light of various cultural traditions, a comprehensive definition of Symbolism as an international literary movement, rather than as only a European literary movement, may also emerge.

Notes

1. *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*, ed. Anna Balakian (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984), p. 9.
2. To name a few, Tu Kuo-ch'ing, "The Introduction to French Symbolism into Modern Chinese and Japanese Poetry," *Tamkang Review*, 1974; Yü Kuang-chung 余光中, "P'ing Tai Wang-shu tê shih" 評戴望舒的詩 (A Study of Tai Wang-shu's Poetry), *Ming Pao* 明報, 1975; Ya Hsüan 痲弦, *Tai Wang-shu Chiüan* 戴望舒卷 (Taipei: Hung Fan Bookstore, 1977); David Jason Liu, "Chinese 'Symbolist' Verse in the 1920s," *Tamkang Review*, 1980; Tu Kuo-ch'ing, "Chinese and Japanese Symbolist Poetics" in *Proceedings of the Xth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association* (New York, 1982); Harry Allan Kaplan, "The Symbolist Movement in Modern Chinese Poetry," diss. Harvard, 1983. I am using the term "Symbolism" to refer to the poetic movement defined by René Wellek in his *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970). This movement originated in nineteenth-century France and extended worldwide. Critics in general include Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Valéry in France; Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot in the U. S.; Rilke in Germany; and Alexander Blok in Russia as part of this tradition. In my paper I shall concentrate on Baudelaire and Verlaine.
3. Although critics generally recognize the importance of this poetic movement, they differ in their evaluation and judgment of the aesthetic merits of Symbolist works. Some critics, such as Yü Kuang-chung, hold a rather negative view of some Chinese Symbolist works, whereas other critics, such as Ya Hsüan, have a positive view of these works.
4. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this essay are mine.

5. *Chung-kuo hsin wên-hsüeh ta-hsi* 中國新文學大系, ed. Chu Tzû-ch'ing, v. 8 (Hong Kong: Hsiang-kang wên-hsüeh yen-chiu shê), p. 3576.
6. For information concerning the isolation that Li suffered as a student in France, see his *P'iao-ling hsien-pi* 飄零閒筆 (*Memoirs of a Drifter*) (Taipei: Ch'iao-lien Publishing Company, 1964).
7. The first two stanzas proceed from the woman's perspective of her struggle and suffering, whereas the third stanza proceeds from the speaker's perspective of an outward response to her situation.
8. *Baudelaire: Selected Poems*, tr. Joanna Richardson (Penguin Books, 1975), p. 29.
9. "Il pleure dans mon coeur," in *Paul Verlaine: Selected Poems*, tr. C. F. MacIntyre (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 103.
10. Chu Tzû-ch'ing, ed. *Chung-kuo hsin wên-hsüeh ta-hsi*, v. 8 (Shanghai: Liang Yu Publishing Company, 1973), pp. 7-8.
11. Alex Preminger, ed. *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 836.
12. Wang Tu-ch'ing, *The Selected Poetry of Tu-ch'ing* 獨清詩選 (Shanghai: Hsin Yü Chou Bookstore, 1931), p. 72.
13. *The Selected Poetry of Tu-ch'ing*, p. 74.
14. *Baudelaire: Selected Poems*, p. 211.
15. Verlaine, *Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes*, ed. Y. -G. Le Dantec (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1962), p. 192.
16. Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961), pp. 80-81.
17. *Baudelaire: Selected Poems*, p. 141.
18. "The Aesthetic Dignity of the 'Fleurs du Mal' " in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Mass: Peter Smith), 1973.
19. *Baudelaire: Selected Poems*, p. 117.
20. *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, p. 206.
21. Li Chin-fa used this image in "Rain," the first two stanzas of which are as follows:

Soft and intimate trembling sounds:
 Raindrops pattering on dead leaves;
 Running here from the ends of the earth,
 You create a little music in my ear drums.

This continuous moaning,
 The sobbing that sinks into my mind,
 I wish to end my life in this continuous moaning,
 No longer using my pen to write cryptic poetry.

22. *Tai Wang-shu Chüan*, ed. Ya Hsüan (Taipei: Hung Fan Bookstore, 1977), pp. 34-37.
23. In modern Chinese poetry, Tai is commonly known as "The poet of Rainy Alley." See *Tai Wang-shu chüan*, ed. Ya Hsüan (Taipei: Hung Fan Bookstore, 1977), p. 174.
24. *Paul Verlaine: Selected Poems*, p. 9. All translations of "Voeu" and "L'Allée" will be quoted hereafter from *Paul Verlaine: Selected Poems*.
25. Tu Hêng, "Preface to the Draft of Wang-shu" in *Tai Wang-shu chüan*, p. 154.
26. In the Pinyin Romanization, "i" is spelled as "y" when it appears at the beginning of a syllable or "yi" when it appears by itself.
27. See *Tai Wang-shu chüan*, pp. 153-57.

28. Yü Kuang-chung, "P'ing Tai Wang-shu tê shih," *Ming Pao* (Dec. 1975), p. 5. Harry Allan Kaplan, "The Symbolist Movement in Modern Chinese Poetry," diss. Harvard, 1983, pp. 244-245.
29. *Tai Wang-shu chüan*, p. 143.
30. Hsu Kai-Yu in his translation (*Twentieth Century Chinese Poetry*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970, p. 181) also noticed the difference in the word usage of the first and last stanzas. I am following Lin Yutang's *Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1972) in translating the word "Ting-hsiang" into "lilac" (p. 441).
31. It is noteworthy that the particle "chê" is used throughout the first half of the poem, while "kuo" and "lê" are used throughout the second half with the exception of the last stanza.
32. See, for instance, Harry Allan Kaplan, "The Symbolist Movement in Modern Chinese Poetry," diss. Harvard, 1983, p. 237.
33. The Chinese tradition based on Buddhism identifies six senses, unlike the Western tradition, which identifies five. Also, except for the last sense, the distinctions are made with the descriptions of body parts rather than actual senses: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind.
34. It is commonly thought that Verlaine's *Sagesse* was modeled on Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes de Verlaine*, p. 1133).
35. René Wellek, "The Term of Concept of Symbolism in Literary History" in *Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 119.
36. In a famous Taoist classic, Chuang Tzŭ once dreamed of becoming a butterfly (*Chuang Tzŭ* 莊子, "All Things Are Equal"). In Western tradition, the butterfly is often used as an emblem of the soul ("The butterfly the ancient of Grecians made / The soul's fair emblem, and its only name" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Psyche").