

Analysis of the Similarities and Differences between Wordsworth's and Tao Yuanming's Pastoral Poetry

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Abstract: Pastoral poetry is regarded as a treasure whether in Chinese or Western literature. In the poetry field, Wordsworth of Britain and Tao Yuanming of the late Eastern Jin Dynasty to the early Southern Song Dynasty were the great romantic poets, and they all had a very important position in the field of pastoral poetry. This paper will discuss the similarities and differences between the Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming's pastoral poetry in terms of comparative analysis. By comparing and analyzing the works of the two, the paper will not only give readers a deeper understanding of the ideological connotation of their works, but also make the readers understand the similarities and differences between the Chinese and Western cultures in the pastoral poetry, thereby also better promote the cultural exchange. At the same time, the two poets advocate return to nature also embodies the theme of the harmonious development of man and nature in today's society, and its simple language style also provided new inspiration for the creation of contemporary poetry.

1. The Similarities between Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming's Pastoral Poetry

1.1 Experience of Returning to the Pastoral life

William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming [1] both chose to living in the tranquil rural areas even if they were very young, they encountered with domestic misfortune and frustrations, both learned a lot of knowledge when they were very young, cannot bear the social indifference and darkness any more. Therefore, with the beautiful dream becomes a bubble disappointedly, they suffered setbacks from reality and society despondently, they both decided to backing to the pastoral life to seek for a comfort and ideal Utopia from pure nature, in spite of they both had great ambitions and infinite confidence towards their future. Ultimately, they devoted their rest life into pastoral life with keen love, and then wrote some outstanding pastoral poetry.

1.2 Themes of Poetry

The themes of Wordsworth's poetry are almost about nature. A great natural poet, "The adorers of nature", he incisively and vividly describes mountains, rivers, flowers, birds, children and

farmers, recalling his own childhood and youth. [2] For him, nature has become an inspiring force that reveals how the soul works. It's an alternative to imagination and intelligence, and it is linked to human development in different environments. It's nature that gives him strength and knowledge that filled him with peace. Many subjects among his works are romantic, charm of novelty to things of everyday. For example, *Lyrical Ballads*, [3] it is the beginning of the Romantic Revival, also is the manifesto of the movement, it demonstrated the deep love for nature and sympathy for the poor. *The Prelude*, an autobiographical poem, considered to be the masterpiece of the sea, is the mental record of his mind that shows the development of his own thoughts and feelings. The joys and sadness of the common people are his themes, which about naivety of simple peasant children, sufferings about the poor and humble peasants.

Tao Yuanming [4] was a famous pastoral poet in China. After his resigning, Tao Yuanming experienced rural life. Meanwhile, he wrote many novels and poems that depicted his pastoral beauty to reflect his quiet and leisurely mood. In addition, he also wrote some works to express political ideals, which shows that he has never forget the political affairs. The contents of his literature are vivid to describe the authentic daily life, the feeling is sincere, the themes are always distinct characters, had the very big influence on subsequent poet creation. There are four main images appear in his poetry: bamboo, chrysanthemum, hermit and wine, through these images to express his emotions, furthermore, symbolize his quality and pursuit. The themes of his poetry often expose the corruption of secular darkness; or to reflect the evil career; or it is unfair to be a poet in the struggle of complaining. Tao is the embodiment of chrysanthemum, the noble quality of chrysanthemum, that is the quality of Tao.

1.3 Language Features

In the preface of *Lyrical Ballads*, he put forward his principles of poetry, he believed that the real role of poetry lies in its power, to familiar and ordinary things making an unexpected luster. As for language, he tried to make his language close to the real language of man. The deliberate simplicity, the refusal to modify, the truth of expression, produced a kind of pure and profound poem without any other poet's poem. The most important contribution he has made is that he has not only started the modern poetry, the poetry of the inner self development, but also changed the process of English poetry by using ordinary speech of the language and by advocating return to nature. His use of the language of ordinary speech was heavily criticized, but he helped English poetry escape the more artificial custom of the 18th century. In terms of language, he insisted and emphasized poetry should be composed in the common language instead of full of rhetorical flourishes.

With respect to Tao Yuanming, the ancient Chinese representative pastoral poet. [5] Tao's pastoral poetry is more about ordinary life with frankly writing out what they see and hear, the use of ordinary language to make people feel natural, warm, sincere emotion, without any artificial buffing marks, to guide the readers to which dilute the fantastic taste of leisurely, walked into the mood created by the poet to go. Tao is a large number of Chinese literature in the history of the first poets to write drinking. In the poem *Drinking*, the author describes the scene where the poet's cabin is built in people's settlements, but he can't hear the noise of the sound traveling outside the cabin. The poet is how to do so? Turned out to be the poet's mind, that thoughts and sentiments away from the hustle and bustle of the earth, so it was a place to live naturally waste away the remote. He kept himself a noble spirit, open-minded approach to life with optimism suffering [6].

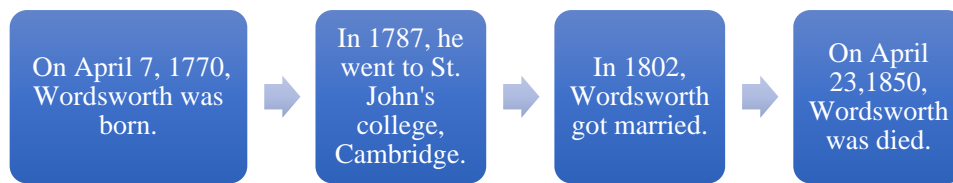


Figure 1: Wordsworth's life cycle

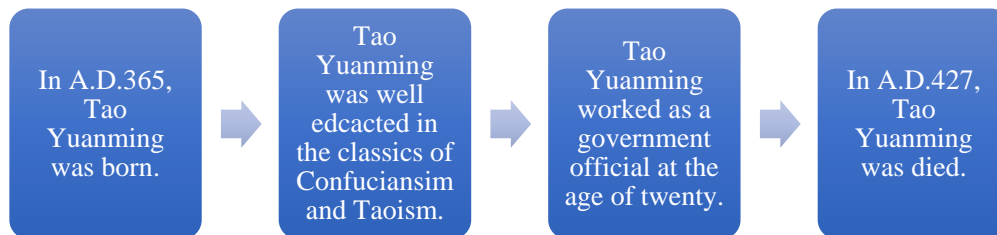


Figure 2: Tao Yuanming's life cycle

It can be seen from figure 1 and figure 2 that these two great poets were born in different eras and had different life experiences, but both held significant positions in the field of pastoral poetry.

2. The Differences between Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming's Pastoral Poetry

2.1 Culture and Time Backgrounds

The most significant difference is the backgrounds and literary tradition, due to the two poets faced with totally different culture and times background particularly. We all know that the Romantic Movement in the Britain Literature made a profound impact on the social and cultural life, especially in the aspect of poetry. The British romantic period was the age of poetry. Blake, Wordsworth, Byron, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats were the major Romantic poets. The *Lyrical Ballads*, it was written by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798 as the manifesto for the British Romanticism. The Movement sparked the divisions among different types of British poetry. Their poems were nostalgic for the earlier Britain and filled with pastoral images of the decaying way of life as Britain moved farther from the rural and more towards the urban. The pastoral literature describes the love and sadness of musical shepherds, usually in an idealized Golden Age of rural innocence and idleness; paradoxically, it is an elaborately artificial cult of simplicity and virtuous frugality. The pastoral tradition in Western literature originated with the Greek idylls of Theocritus (3rd century BCE), who wrote for an urban readership in Alexandria about shepherds in his native. The natural world is the frontier of the poetic imagination. Nature is not only the main source of poetic imagery, but it also provides the dominant subject matter. In the background, as a pastoral poetry, Wordsworth advocated of backing to nature and sought for heart's comfort, his view of human and nature was tended to approach the Christian beliefs.

Taoism and Confucianism are two philosophical schools in the intellectual history of China, they made influenced in Tao Yuanming and his works mostly. During the Eastern Jin Dynasty, although Taoist and Buddhist concept was very popular at that time, he was influenced by the Confucian classics in his youth, mostly received Confucian education. He used optimistic attitude to face the poverty of life and looked forward to a quiet pastoral life. He also had ambitions, nevertheless, in the stage of political corruption and the warlord's killing, his ideal cannot be achieved. He had no choice to use the Taoist [7] and Buddhist concept to seek inner peace after inner struggle and contradictions. This peace is often achieved through the pursuit of pastoral life and nature. His works are not only nourished by the impact of traditional Chinese culture, but also a present from

nature.

2.2 Unique Poetic Realm and View Point on Nature

Even though both Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming shares the similar strong attraction to nature, they focus nature on their poetic creation, there still have differences in poetic realms. In Wordsworth's pastoral poems [8], he makes full use of the objects of nature into his inspiration with abundant imagination, while Tao Yuanming tends to integrate into nature without much meditation. Wordsworth [9] used to put his own point into the lines, and gradually establishes his personal style and poetic realm of self-existence. Conversely, Tao Yuanming is tentative to persist his inner world in poetic realm. In fact, it is also shows the origin in the different cultures in poetic realm of the West and the East. "Spiritual ecology" is the existence and evolution of the spiritual life. From the perspective of the spiritual ecology, Tao Yuanming's pastoral poetry reflects his pursuits of idyllic natural life, virtue of adhering to poverty, spiritual change from official seeker to common poet and farmer, affinity to nature, love for farmers, thought for principles of life, and yearning for an ideal society. The spiritual position and complete system of Tao Yuanming's pastoral poetry is constituted by his pursuit, role-changing, love, yearning and sublimation, which had myriad symbiotic relationships and created an idyllic landscape of spiritual ecology for later generations.

It is obviously different about the view point on nature that due to William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming [10] stay in completely different backgrounds. Wordsworth regards "childhood" as the indispensable element for him to return to nature, and most of his poems' theme refer to childhood. In terms of Wordsworth, he thinks that the children are divine portion of nature, they are the nearest to God and come from the heaven. As a result, Wordsworth's childhood plays an irreplaceable role in his literary creation, his religious love of nature awoke in a boarding grammar school. His distinct love and attachment to the place where he spent most of his life - the Lake District- have a profound effect on his character and his works.

Wordsworth [11] believes that as long as people can come close to nature, then God will come closer to him. Wordsworth's opinion of nature can be traced back to the theory of Christianity. However, unlike Wordsworth, Taoism-the traditional Chinese philosopher has influenced Tao Yuanming's pastoral poetry deeply. He advocates that man and nature are one, people must adhere to eternal and necessary laws of nature. What's more, Tao's farming plays the unique role in his conception on nature, his viewpoint is expressed in the poem. Wordsworth's claim seems to be analogous to the views of Heidegger. Naturally, Wordsworth argues, discloses the one underlying principle, which the people have failed to identify. He advises every human being to recognize this animating principle. In fact, he has used his poetry to disclose this fact, and he attempts to articulate that man is not the lord of Nature. He advises everyone to realize his or her duty of loving and preserving nature.

2.3 Spiritual Pursuit

Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming return to nature after escaping from the cruel realities and noisy public life, they want to seek for the comfort and peace of inner world by appreciating the beauty of nature. Wordsworth lead people to close to nature in his pastoral poems, he is tentative to retain the kindness and simplicity of the initial human. Tao Yuanming [12] usually spares no effort to restore his moral individuality and pursuit. Their differences are reflected in that Wordsworth emphasizes the human's spiritual liberation, whereas, Tao Yuanming stresses on his own personal moral disposition. They both choose to live in reclusion, Wordsworth always insists that nature have the magical power and it could cure man's spiritual wounds, therefore, man should back to nature with harmony life, only in this way, could man's heart be rescued from the complicated society. Tao

Yuanming was encouraged by his ancestor’s achievements and influenced by the Confucianism in his youthful days. He holds the great ambitions to help the common people out of poverty and unfairness. But Tao’s unfavorable political career and humble birth make him frustrate. Subsequently, he turns to pursue the recluse life and aspire to back to nature to finds the tranquility of mind. After totally disappointed of the highly corrupted society, in the late years, Tao Yuanming suffers from hunger and cold, even he has no choice to beg for food, but he never changes his principle. As he wrote, “when I sow in the spring, I will suffer greatly because I am always worried that the harvest will not bring food.” “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”, this is a poem written by William Wordsworth and of course it is about nature. With his pure and poetic language, Wordsworth takes us into a beautiful world where there are daffodils [13], trees and breeze. It can convey his pursuit of life, he was the first to find the words that related to the natural phenomenon of the most basic sense.

3. The Practical Significance of Pastoral Poetry

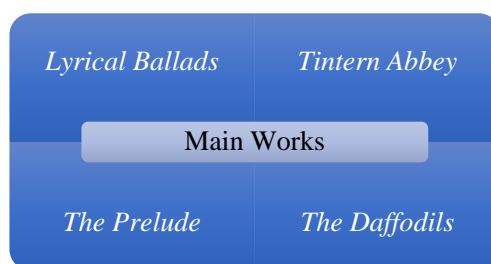


Figure 3: Wordsworth’s main works

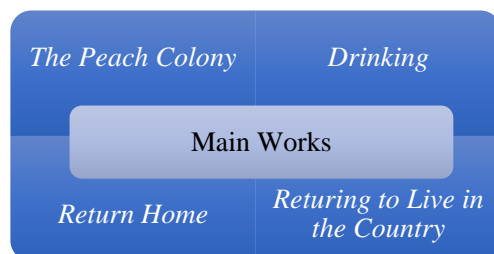


Figure 4: Tao Yuanming’s main works

From figure 3 and figure 4, we can clearly see that the two great poets had created great works at different times and established a stable position in the literary world through these works.

3.1 Benefits for the Harmonious Development

The main purpose of pastoral poems [14] is to select the events and circumstances in daily life, describe events or scenery with the language from beginning to end that the common people often use to. At the same time, the most important thing in our daily life is to discover the fundamental laws of our nature from these events and the plots with an imaginative glory. The laws mainly about how we associate ideas with each other in a mood of excitement, so that these events and the plots seems to be interesting. The poets usually choose the subtle idyllic life theme, because the main passion that from people’s hearts could find a better soil in this life, gradually, achieve a mature position. The less constraints, the more simple and powerful words people could say. People’s basic emotions coexist in a simpler state in this pastoral life, so that people can think more precisely and express them more forcefully. Just so, the various customs of the pastoral life are germinating from these basic emotions, in addition, these customs are easier to understand more durable due to the

necessity of pastoral work and farming. Finally, people’s passion is the natural and beauty merged into a single whole permanently in the pastoral life. The theme of pastoral poetry return to nature is aim to purify and sublimate the hearts of people, and it also embodies the theme of harmonious development of people and nature in today’s society.

3.2 New Inspiration for the Creation and Appreciation of Contemporary Poems

A pastoral poet is a person who speak to the common people with his poems and emotions. [15] He is a person that more sensitive, enthusiastic and warm than the ordinary person, he knows more about human nature and holds more spacious soul. He enjoys his enthusiasm and will, while happy to observe the similar zeal and will of the phenomenon in daily life, he also was used to create works with simple language. Such a language is produced from repeated experiences and normal emotions, it is more permanent and philosophical than the language usually used by the average poet. In the creation and appreciation of contemporary poems, we must learn about the language and spirits of pastoral poems and grasp the capacity that could close to nature to arouse enthusiasm from our heart.

In poetry creation, [16] people must learn the spirit of pastoral poetry, pastoral poets are good at observing surroundings to find and appreciate ordinary things that are often ignored in daily life, perhaps these ordinary things can bring different experiences and insights to the poets. As a result of this practice, the writer often gets a ability to express their feelings and thoughts more agile, especially some of the thoughts and feelings, which they are not generate from the direct external stimuli, but for his own choice or the construction of his mind.

4. Conclusion

Table 1: Similarities and Differences

Similarities
Experience of returning to the pastoral life
Themes of poetry
Themes of poetry
Differences
Culture and time backgrounds.
Unique poetic realm and view point on nature
Spiritual pursuit

As we can see from table 1, there are some similarities and differences between Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming’s pastoral poetry. From these, we can have a deeper understanding on their works.

Meanwhile, the contemporary writers should cherish and develop the pastoral poems, especially the theme of “return to nature”. For individuals, nature is the spiritual home and psychic comfort, it should be cherished perpetually. The viewpoints of Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming have greatly influenced a great number of writers in West and China with their simple and graceful language described the scenery of nature and people’s lives. In the form and rhythm of poetry, they are more flexible and free, they rarely used strict form of poetry that classical poets commonly always use to. Therefore, their beautiful lyrics make people gracious and moving, it sounds inflexible, smooth and natural. Although Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming come from different times and countries, they both advocate return to nature to purify and sublimate the hearts of people. Moreover, the theme of two poets’ returning to nature reflects the harmonious development of man and nature in today’s society. Their simple language style also provides new inspiration for the creation of modern

poetry.

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