

# IMAGES OF NATURE AND ITS SYMBOLISM IN SHU TING'S POETRY AS A RENDERING OF HER MIND AND HEART

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Shu Ting is one of the best-known female poets in contemporary China, a member of a group of the poets whose work is known as Misty Poetry. This article is concerned with the feeling for nature in Shu Ting's works; in analysing some of Shu Ting's poems author finds the way of using words connected with nature, such as trees, animals, the sea, etc., and their poetic meaning in her artistic language. It is focused on the purpose of using attributes of nature in her poetry, whether they are used in a metaphoric sense or as symbols. Landscape and nature, although it is not her core theme, has its certain place in Shu Ting's poetry. In describing nature she express her feelings, she often uses personification and allusions to compare the human beings to the trees and animals. At the beginning in describing nature she found the way to say something, what she could not say directly, which has turned to using metaphors connected to nature as an inseparable part of her poetic language. Although Shu Ting personally regard herself as a modern poet with not many connections with Chinese tradition. Sometimes, the traces of traditional Chinese poetry on nature, which has a long tradition in China, not only in poetry, but also in painting, which in the ancient Chinese cultural world is often merged with poetry, can be found also in her works. In mentioning traditional Chinese landscape poetry, we can see in the poetry of Shu Ting that she has some common features with traditional Chinese poetry, whose seem to be more unconscious.

**Key words:** Shu Ting, contemporary Chinese poetry, contemporary Chinese literature, modern Chinese poetry, Misty poetry, menglongshi

Shu Ting 舒婷 (\*1952 – ), one of the best-known female poets in contemporary China, has often used motifs of nature in her poetry. She started to write poetry in 1979. She became a member of a group of young poets whose work is known as Misty Poetry. Although the name of the group was initially used in denigration (1980), it gained popularity as a neutral label of poets whose

works appeared in the underground literary magazine *Today*. The Misty group consisted of five core poets Bei Dao 北岛, Gu Cheng 顾城, Yang Lian 杨炼, Jiang He 江河 and Shu Ting, who is the only woman in this group. These poets never accepted the classification of *menglong* 朦胧 and all stressed the stylistic diversity of the group.<sup>1</sup> From the establishment point of view, the individualistic content and form of *menglongshi* was the direct result of the influence of Modernism. Modernism was also held the responsible for the decadence, alienation, nihilism, escapism, pessimism and retrogressive aestheticism that the *menglongshi* allegedly embodied.<sup>2</sup> Shu Ting was the first of the group who was allowed to publish a collection of her poetry.<sup>3</sup> Her poetry is tender, soft and very personal; she brings the feminine point of view to contemporary Chinese poetry.

She wrote and published several books of poetry such as *A Boat with Two Masts* (*Shuang weichuan* 双桅船), *Singing Iris* (*Hui chang ge de yuanweihua* 会唱歌的鸢尾花), *Archeopterix* (*Shizuniao* 始祖鸟), *The Poems of Shu Ting* (*Shu Ting de shi* 舒婷的诗), as well as books of essays, such as *Smoke of Hearth* (*Xin yan* 心烟), *True Water is Fragrant-less* (*Zhen shui wu xiang* 真水无香) and many others.<sup>4</sup>

Shu Ting, real name Gong Peiyu 龚佩瑜 (Gong Shuting 龚舒婷 was the name she used at school), has born in Jinjiang, Fujian province, and grew up on Gulangyu (鼓浪屿) island. Her parents were both from a middle-class intellectual background and as a result suffered in various campaigns leading up to the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, Shu Ting, like other young people of her generation, was sent to work in the countryside before she finished her secondary education. She was allowed to return to Xiamen in Fujian in 1973, where she worked on constructing sites and in the steel and textile factories. These experiences found expression in some of her earlier poems. In the late 1980s she was accepted as a full-time writer by the official Fujian Writers Association.<sup>5</sup> Maybe because her works bear a smaller number of political metaphors than the works of the authors mentioned above, she was accepted by the Chinese establishment sooner than the other poets of Misty Poetry. She wrote more than 100 poems, but sometimes she kept silence for a few years. After the incident in 1989, she felt so depressed and upset that she felt she would never be able to write again. But after study stays in Germany, she got a new inspiration and she wrote her last poems.<sup>6</sup> She is devoted to writing essays

<sup>1</sup> SHU TING. *Selected Poems*, p. 7 (shortened).

<sup>2</sup> YEH, M. *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, p. xxxii.

<sup>3</sup> HONG ZICHENG. *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, p. 342.

<sup>4</sup> SHU TING. *Zhen shui wu xiang* 真水无香 [True Water is Fragrant-less], p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> SHU TING. *Selected Poems*, p. 9 (shortened).

<sup>6</sup> My interview with Shu Ting at her home in Gulangyu on September 16, 2011.

now. The last date of her poems published in her selection of poetry is the year 1997.

Despite her importance, there are written much fewer theses in Western languages about her than about other members of the Misty poetry group, especially Bei Dao and Gu Cheng. From studies about Shu Ting, there is especially *Writing with your Body: Literature as a Wound – Remarks on the Poetry of Shu Ting* written by Wolfgang Kubin, where he analyses the problem of creating a process as a kind of suffering in feminine literature. In addition to this study, there are only a few shorter texts on Shu Ting's poetry, such as for example the introduction to the translation of Shu Ting's poetry into English written by De-an Wu Swihart.<sup>7</sup> In Cheng Zhongyi's *Afterword: The Poetry of Shu Ting* love, human relations and nature are the focus of Shu Ting's poetry.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these studies, there are some materials in Chinese, but these are mostly articles from Chinese literary journals, interviews with the poet and some M.A. theses written by Chinese students. In comparing more than twenty articles written about Bei Dao, or more than ten articles about Gu Cheng, we can see the difference. It may be caused by the fact that Shu Ting never lived abroad except for her study stays or maybe also because she is very shy; sometimes she used to keep silent between publishing her books of poetry, and she quitted writing poetry in about 1997.

From the translations of her poetry into English, I would like to mention especially the translation of *Selected Poems* by Eva Hung, which is, as far I know, the only selection of Shu Ting's poetry published as a book and authorized by the author. Not all of the poems have been translated by Eva Hung.<sup>9</sup> In addition to this, Shu Ting's poetry has been translated also by Michelle Yeh<sup>10</sup> and Julia C. Lin.<sup>11</sup>

Although Shu Ting's main concern is with human relations,<sup>12</sup> when reading Shu Ting's poetry we can find a great number of poems where she describes nature as a landscape or mentions trees and animals, such as a swan, crane, etc., as a way of self-expression. In my article, I am concerned with her feeling for

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<sup>7</sup> SWIHART, De-an Wu. *Introduction*, pp. 5 – 17.

<sup>8</sup> CHEN ZHONGYI. *Afterword: Some Thoughts on Shu Ting's Poetry*. In SHU TING. *Selected Poems*, p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> SHU TING. *Selected Poems*. In addition to Eva Hung, Tao Tao Liu, Gordon Osing & De-an Wu Swihart, Janice Wickeri, Henry Y. H. Zhao and E. E. Pollard participated in translating.

<sup>10</sup> YEH, M. *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*.

<sup>11</sup> LIN, J. C. *An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Women's Poetry*.

<sup>12</sup> CHEN ZHONGYI. *Afterword: Some Thoughts on Shu Ting's Poetry*. In SHU TING. *Selected Poems*, p. 132.

nature in her works; in analysing some of Shu Ting's poems I will find the way of using words connected with nature, such as trees, animals, the sea, etc., and their poetic meaning in her artistic language. I will focus on the purpose of using attributes of nature in her poetry, whether they are used in a metaphoric sense or as symbols. Sometimes, I compare her poems with traditional Chinese poetry on nature, which has a long tradition in China, not only in poetry, but also in painting, which in the ancient Chinese cultural world is often merged with poetry.

In analysing Shu Ting's poems, I partly use the translations of other sinologists (Eva Hung) because of their literary qualities as native speakers. However, for some poems I would like to analyse in my paper I did not find English translations or I believe my own translation to be more exact; thus I use my own translations whose meaning is very close to the original. However, I have not intended to regard them as literally translations of poetry, but only as interlinear versions of translations.

### The poetry of landscape in traditional painting and poetry

China outdistanced Europe by more than a millennium in portraying the so-called "verinnerlichte Natur".<sup>13</sup> In China, nature has been a very important topic not only for poets but also for painters. We can find strong feelings for the mountains, lakes, rivers and sea in the history of Chinese poetry since the period of the Six Dynasties (220 or 222 – 589), where we can find the beginning of the *shanshui shi* (山水诗) landscape poetry (exactly translated as "the poetry of the mountains and water", which is the Chinese word for the landscape). The tide of movement of landscape poetry in that time was caused by a special cultural and social situation and by uncertainty. Many people felt disappointed and they would escape from the world. Some escaped to the pleasure of talking, to the world of Daoist and Buddhist philosophy, some to the world of creation and to the landscape.<sup>14</sup> Because they were educated and very cultivated people, the aesthetic principles of painting and poetry saw a great change; they admired the philosophy of Laozi (老子) and Zhuangzi (庄子), they loved nature and realized the beauty of the landscape; they entered into this world and they started to express their own feelings through landscape paintings and poetry, which were at that time very close to each other.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> GÁLIK, M. Kubin Wolfgang: Der durchsichtige Berg. Die Entwicklung der Naturanschauung in der chinesischen Literatur, p. 276.

<sup>14</sup> According to: YANG LIERONG 羊列荣. 20 shiji Zhongguo guandai wenxue yanjiu, shige juan. 20 世纪中国古代文学研究史, 诗歌卷 [Twentieth Century, The History of Ancient Chinese Literature Studies, Volume of Poetry], p. 173.

<sup>15</sup> WANG YONGLIANG 王永亮. Zhongguo yu daoia sixiang 中国与道家思想 [China and the Thoughts of Daoism], p. 89.

Describing nature in Chinese poetry is closely connected with the philosophy of Neo-Daoism,<sup>16</sup> (*xuanxue* 玄学, dark or obscure philosophy), which directly influenced the life and ideals of educated people. They escaped to the countryside, where they searched for personal freedom and spiritual ennoblement.<sup>17</sup> Nature could<sup>18</sup> become a self-standing object of Chinese poetry because the necessary philosophical, social and literary conditions had been created for it.

The role of nature in Chinese poetry or in Chinese painting was not only to be a complement to human feelings; nature often became the main subject of poems in ancient Chinese culture.

Chinese first natural lyrical poems are connected to Neo-Daoist philosophy. One of the best known Neo-Daoist poets is Sun Chuo 孙绰 (314 – 371), a poet, philosopher and alchemist.<sup>19</sup> Xie Lingyun 谢灵运 (385 – 433) is considered to be the first author to write poetry of nature par excellence. The basic resource of the relationship toward the countryside is the same as the Neo-Daoist poets. Xie Lingyun apprehends nature in accord with the natural course of things and sensible responses to its changes; he found therein the expression of his personal feelings and the search for consolation.<sup>20</sup> Xie Lingyun was also a poet and he researched Buddhist texts.<sup>21</sup> Xie employs a paradox familiar to both Daoist and Buddhist thinking by virtue of which distinctions can be simultaneously transcended and embraced. Thus contemplation of a mountain scene not only releases Xie from all concerns about the material world, including the very beauties of nature he is observing, but it also effects a realization of the ultimate meaninglessness of all such distinctions as that between the worldly and the super mundane and hence this enables him to recover his attachment to scene.<sup>22</sup> In the development of Chinese poetry describing nature we can also find some traces of Buddhism. The famous painter and poet Zong Bing 宗炳 (375 – 443) in

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<sup>16</sup> I am using the word “Neo-Daoism”, although the Chinese usually do not use this term; they mostly speak of “*xuanxue*” or the “philosophy of Lao-Zhuang” (Laozi and Zhuangzi).

<sup>17</sup> WANG YONGLIANG 王永亮. *Zhongguo yu daoia sixiang* 中国与道家思想 [China and the Thoughts of the Daoism], p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> GÁLIK, M. Kubin Wolfgang: Der durchsichtige Berg. Die Entwicklung der Naturanschauung in der chinesischen Literatur, p. 275.

<sup>19</sup> According to LOMOVÁ, O. *Poselství krajiny, obraz přírody v díle tchangského básníka Wang Weje* [The Message of the Landscape, and the Image of Nature in the Works of Wang Wei, a Poet of the Tang Dynasty], p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 46 – 47.

<sup>21</sup> ZHANG JIANHUA 张剑华. *Han chuan fojiao huihua yishu* 汉传佛教绘画艺术 [Chinese Tradition in Buddhist Art], p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> YU, P. *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition*, p. 157.

his philosophical *Advice on Painting the Landscape* (*Hua shan shui xu* 畫山水序), the first comprehensive philosophical essay on painting in Chinese history, which is very important not only for visual art, but also for the whole cultural history, explains the theory that there is a parallel between the sage and the sacred mountains and rivers; both reveal Dao, one with the merit of his spirit and other with their form.<sup>23</sup> According to the opinion of some historians, although Zong Bing personally was a Buddhist, his landscape essay is deeply influenced by Daoist aesthetic philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

In the works of some Chinese poets such as Tao Qian<sup>25</sup> 陶潛 (372 – 427) and Wang Wei 王維 (701 – 761 or 699 – 761), nature assumes a deeper significance, a significance quite different from that perceived by the English “nature poets”, notably Wordsworth.<sup>26</sup> Nature to these Chinese poets is not a physical manifestation of the Creator, but something that is a virtue of itself. From this it follows that nature is neither benignant nor hostile to man. Hence, Man is not conceived of as forever struggling against Nature but forming part of it.<sup>27</sup> An obvious feature of Tao Yuanming's poetry is the truly subjective experience of reality. His subjectivity is visible also from the formulation he chose: conventional images and symbolism do not play such an important role in his poetic discourse; his personal experiences became more and more important.<sup>28</sup> Tao Yuanming secured his tranquillity within the chaos of a city by means of his insightfulness, cheerfulness and detachment, as is depicted in his poems. He demonstrates an aesthetic obsession in disinterested contemplation of the beautiful in the surroundings, which include blooming chrysanthemums, summer hills, mountain air, the waning of the day, and birds flying together, from which one can also feel the joy of nature and the pleasure of Zen (*Chan* 禪).<sup>29</sup>

The poetry of nature as a complex of fixed motifs and poetic conventions was constituted before the period of Tang dynasty. From the beginning, the poetic view of nature is connected to philosophical reflection on the cosmic order and the consideration of the tragedy of human life as we can notice in prosaic texts, too. The early lyrics of nature are notable for the topic of death and living in solitude – in the mountains, in the village, etc.; Nature here is understood as a

<sup>23</sup> MUNKARTA, K. Concepts of lei and Kan-lei in Early Chinese Art Theory. In BRUSH, S., MURCK, C. *Theories of the Arts in China*, p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> WANG YONGLIANG. 王永亮. *Zhongguo yu daoia sixiang* 中国与道家思想 [China and the Thoughts of Daoism], pp. 100 – 101.

<sup>25</sup> Also called Tao Yuanming 陶淵明.

<sup>26</sup> William Wordsworth (April 7, 1770 – April 23, 1850).

<sup>27</sup> According to LIU, J. J. Y., *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>28</sup> According to LOMOVÁ, O. *Poselství krajiny, obraz přírody v díle tchangského básníka Wang Weje* [The Message of the Landscape and the Image of Nature in the Works of Wang Wei, a Poet of the Tang Dynasty], p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> According to WANG KEPING. *Spirit of Chinese Poetics*, pp. 136 – 137.

dynamical order which harmonizes all forces and processes in the universe and determines human life. In the period after the collapse of the Han dynasty, the consciousness of this order returns poets their stability which was lost in times of the decay of values in society.<sup>30</sup> In the time of the flourishing Tang Dynasty, Nature was one of the key motifs and Wang Wei 王維 was a typical author of the lyrics of nature of his time. For hundreds of years the style of his poetry has been appreciated and imitated.<sup>31</sup>

From the point of view of Chinese poetry of nature, it is very interesting that they have been concerned especially with the motifs of some event regularly repeating in nature, depending on changes in the day and the changing seasons in the year. These motifs often became used images; poets use them to create an atmosphere of a real landscape, but also to express the feeling of floating time.<sup>32</sup> In some poems by Shu Ting, there is another important aspect in describing nature, which also appears in ancient Chinese poetry. This is the idea of impermanence (*fei yongjiuxing* 非永久性), looking to changes in nature to realize passing time and the shortness of life.

However, looking to ancient Chinese landscape poetry we cannot forget that this kind of poetry was originally defined as poetry written by men, as an escape from the ordinary world to the world of the imagination and bearing some features of Taoist philosophy. The poets writing landscape poetry in the Chinese tradition were often officials who had left their posts or retired and gone to the countryside to find the beauty of the landscape; they often were painters and calligraphists as well as poets. In analysing Shu Ting's poetry, we should keep in mind that she personally felt herself to be a modern poet of the twentieth century with no great conscious connections with traditional Chinese landscape poetry. According to Hong Zhicheng, the artistic sources of her lyrical style and technique may be linked to Pushkin, Yesenin, and Tagore as well as Chinese poets such as Xu Zhimo and He Chifang.<sup>33</sup> Later, she was inspired in her works by the art language of modernism. Thus as we can see in her poems, in the way of using language, the structure of her verses, etc., they are much more influenced by Western poetic language than Chinese traditional poetry. There is no doubt that her poetry is the poetry of modern women of the twentieth century; it is obvious from her style of writing, from the use of free verse or verse reminding us of folk songs rather than the traditional form of a poem based on the rhythm which had been used in ancient Chinese poetry. However, by

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<sup>30</sup> LOMOVÁ, O. *Poselství krajiny, obraz přírody v díle tchangského básníka Wang Weje* [The Message of the Landscape and the Image of Nature in the Works of Wang Wei, a Poet of the Tang Dynasty], p. 62.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp. 27 – 28.

<sup>33</sup> HONG ZICHENG. *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, p. 342.

carefully looking at her verses, we can still find some unconscious signs of Chinese tradition in her metaphors in some terms she uses or even in the atmosphere of some of her poems. The tradition has had a strong appeal for artists in China for centuries, no matter if they realized it or not. They are struggling with it, they are trying to innovate it, to escape from it. In the twentieth century some Chinese poets even rejected the domestic tradition by accepting Western concepts of beauty and poetry, but there are still some traces of the strong tradition in Chinese poetry.

The beginning of modern Chinese poetry is usually associated with the cultural ferment of approximately the period from 1917 to 1920, during which *baihua* 白话 or “plain language” partially displaced the classical Chinese written language in social use. By the 1930s the practitioners of *baihua* poetry had built up a substantial but uneven corpus of so-called New Poetry in which the vocabulary and allusive resources of Chinese poetry since antiquity were joined in a creative but uneasy marriage to the entire gamut of Western poetry, philosophy and the Western aesthetic as these became accessible to educated Chinese in the early decades of the century.<sup>34</sup> After the break caused by political events in China, especially the Cultural Revolution, Chinese poetry after the end of the Cultural Revolution continued to use modern language to write poetry and it tied up the successful authors of the 1930s.

As for the writers of New Poetry, even in the early 1980s they were repeatedly challenged to demonstrate the artistic value and the meaning of their forms, vocabulary and images, though in many cases the elements concerned were scarcely distinguishable from those used half a century before.<sup>35</sup>

### **The poetry of landscape by Shu Ting**

According to Chen Zongyi, Shu Ting has never written a single pure landscape poem.<sup>36</sup> Her main topic is the world of humans, human relationships and feelings of love, sorrow and melancholy. Despite this, nature is one of her main inspirations. Rather than describing nature, she uses the image of nature in her poems to express her own feelings. In the first category of Shu Ting's poems of nature we can include poems describing the landscape. This kind of poetry is very close to traditional landscape poetry as I have mentioned and as we know from many ancient poems. There we can often see the landscape as a reflection of strong emotions, the landscape as escape from the real world, or a landscape

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<sup>34</sup> HAFT, L. (Ed.). *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900 – 1949*. Volume III, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> HAFT, L. (Ed.). *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900 – 1949*. Volume III, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> CHEN ZHONGYI. Afterword: Some Thoughts on Shu Ting's Poetry. In SHU TING. *Selected Poems*, p. 132.



which reminds us of the shortness of our lives in comparison with its regular changes – the coming of sunset and autumn and the passing of spring.

For examples of this kind of poem in Shu Ting's poetry, I have chosen some of her poems which, I believe, explain the way of using the landscape in her artistic language. The first poem is *Autumn Thoughts* 秋思.<sup>37</sup> In this poem there is a typical intersection between describing nature and expressing the author's feelings. Ancient poets often merged reality with their feelings in poetry.

In the first part of the poem she gives us images of fallen leaves lying on the ground when autumn approaches (autumn journeys relentlessly on the leaves day and night 秋, 在树叶上日夜兼程/the hour strikes 钟点敲过/then grows old 立刻陈旧了/and yellow; it 黄黄地/drifts down 飘下).

After the first verses of this poem we can notice a swing in the meaning, although it was gently indicated by the word relentlessly in the first stroke. The poem became more personal; the author turned her attention towards the author's inner world (we its hostages are swept along 我们被挟持着向前飞奔/unable to call for help 既无从呼救/ unwilling to give up the struggle 又不肯放弃挣扎). She expresses the inability to struggle with time, or better said, with destiny, but at the same time she wants the struggling to continue. A swarm of wasps emphasizes the atmosphere of anxiety in the mind of the author lyrical ego walking in the scenery, which becomes hostile to her.

It continues the feeling of anxiety. The journey is turning more and more dangerous (the path behind us turned cold and dim 身后的小路也寒了也弱了/we know nothing can be recovered 明知拾不回什么/yet out of habit our eyes linger on the twisting path 目光仍习惯在那里蜿蜒); this is not relaxed walking in the beautiful autumn scenery, but a journey where wanderers are lost.

They do not know how to go home. This may indicate an unstable situation in the author's life hidden in the symbol of a painful journey. The atmosphere of the poem is in grades: the roots climbing to the heart with piercing pain are an expression of pain in the author's heart (the roots you have shed 你所脱落的根/climb up my heart with a piercing pain 剧痛地往身上爬). Time is flying (every minute you touch turns into the past 手触的每一分钟都成为过去). Here there appears the motif of a great palm without the possibility of escaping with its origins in Buddhism; Sun Wukong 孙悟空, the powerful monkey from *Journey*

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<sup>37</sup> The original poem in Chinese In SHU TING 舒婷. *Yi zhong biao'yan fengge, Shu Ting zi xuan shiji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集 [A Kind of Style of Playing, Shu Ting's Personal Selection of Poetry], p. 198; SHU TING, *Selected Poems*, pp. 100 – 101.

to the West 西游记, was unable to escape from the great palm of Buddha<sup>38</sup> (before the giant palm 在那只巨掌/reaches you 未触摸你之前/think again 你想吧/you still cannot go home 你还是不能回家). Returning home can be understood also as returning home after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1973, which the author had experienced personally. As was already mentioned at the beginning of the study, her parents suffered in the time of the Cultural Revolution and she had been sent to the poverty-stricken countryside.<sup>39</sup>

At the end of the poem she expresses her helplessness towards destiny. No matter which way it will be chosen, there is always the same end, but the fact of meeting it is not necessarily a bad end to the story (you may go this way 从这边走/ or that way 从那边走/ at the last we shall meet 最终我们都会相遇). The metaphor of opening like ripened pea-pods reminds me of passing away, stressed more by a melancholic autumn (in the end we shall burst open 结局便是自行爆裂/ like ripened pea-pods 像那些熟豆荚), but it can also be understood as the impletion of personal destiny in the philosophical sense.

In Shu Ting's poem *The Age of Autumn* 立秋华年<sup>40</sup> the influence of traditional landscape poetry is visible. Here we can find images of flying geese compared to the verse or short poem, and chrysanthemums, seasonal flowers which had frequently appeared in traditional poetic vocabulary in ancient China.

In the following poem the feeling of passing summer and the idea of quickly flying time is even more obvious. In this poem she is describing the melancholic feeling of autumn arriving in the south, where the seasonal changes are not so sudden or as visible as in the northern places (in the south, autumn holds no fear for the leaves 在南方叶子都不知惊秋). The melancholic atmosphere of autumn is an outside image of the author's inner mood. Nature has become a metaphor for the author's soul. Autumn can be understood here also as the autumn of human life. Although the attributes of the ending summer are not so clear, it is presented in the poem with a tiny breath of wind.

The motifs of autumn are presented by flying geese (the sorrowful geese 雁群 哀哀/ flying in formation as a short poem or long verse 或列成七律或排成绝句

<sup>38</sup> For the whole story see WU CHENG'EN. *Journey to the West*. Vol. I., pp. 123 – 124. Also see the Chinese original: WU CHENG'EN 吴承恩. *Xiyouji* 西游记 [Journey to the West]. *Shang*, 上 [Vol. I.], pp. 73 – 74.

<sup>39</sup> According to SHU TING. *Zhen shui wu xiang* 真水无香 [True Water is Fragrant-less], p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> The original in Chinese In SHU TING 舒婷. *Zuihou de wange*. 最后的挽歌 [The Last Evening Song], pp. 143 – 144; in English In SHU TING. *Selected Poems*, pp. 128 – 129.

/only cry about the chill in ancient texts 只在古书中喉寒), which reminds her of ancient poetry being full of awareness of the season and full of inner meanings hidden in images of nature. In describing the behaviour of pigeons (pigeons occupy the meat market and the skies 家鸽占在肉市与天空) and seasonal flowers like chrysanthemums and butterfly grass (florists display chrysanthemums and butterfly grass 花店同时出售菊花和蝴蝶草), we can observe images of stillness and the coming autumn filled by an atmosphere of sorrow.

According to James (J.Y.) Liu, most Chinese poetry displays a keen awareness of time, and expresses regret over its irretrievable passing. A Chinese poem often gives a clearer and more precise indication of the season and the time of day than a Western poem. There are hundreds of Chinese poems lamenting the fading away of spring, grieving over the coming of autumn or dreading the approach of old age.<sup>41</sup> Motifs of autumn coming at noon or at dawn also bear traces of ancient poems (autumn invades perhaps at noon perhaps at dawn perhaps 秋天登陆也许午时也许拂晓也许).

After describing changes of nature in the time of autumn she sinks inside her soul. She feels that her heart has not been purified enough; there still exist a lot of things unsolved in her mind (quenching in the furnace of summer 经过一夏天的淬火/ has not purified my heart of all its sand 心情犹未褪尽泥沙).

She compares her heart to a dagger, shining but dangerous; she presents her fear of hurting anybody with her feelings (though it now shines brilliantly like a dagger 却也雪亮有如一把利刀/too dangerous to give to another 不敢授柄他人 / for fear of hurting myself 纵然刺伤自己). She is seeing her face as an old temple covered by moss (a face like an old temple grown with moss 脸上一派古刹苔深). This metaphor might be simply understood as a symbol of ageing, but it can be also generalized as a symbol of needlessness, and the abandoned temple, where there are no more visitors, as a religion that nobody trusts anymore.

In the last two strokes, she clearly declares she has realized that her time is slowly passing. The describing of autumn at the beginning is transformed into the personal pronouncement of the poet (no need to check the calendar 不必查看日历/for me autumn came eight years ago 八年前我已立秋).

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<sup>41</sup> According to LIU, J. J. Y. *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, p. 50.

At the end of the poem we can find a point of view closely connected to traditional Chinese poetry – the sorrow of floating time and ephemerality, which we can often find in the works of ancient poets – for example, Wang Xizhi's 王羲之 (303 – 361) *Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion* 蘭亭集序 (*lan ting ji xu*). As Shu Ting admitted, at the beginning, she was willfully looking for inspiration in Western poetry rather than in traditional Chinese poetry. She had merely not realized whether she was influenced by Chinese tradition. Only after some Western literary theorists, for example Wolfgang Kubin, had mentioned her poetry as being very Chinese that she recognized the unconscious traces of the ancient tradition in her own works.<sup>42</sup> This is a fact which I have noticed many times in interviewing Chinese painters; at the beginning of their career, they denied all possible impacts of Chinese tradition, declaring themselves as modern artists linked with world culture, but after some years they realized (mostly after living or studying abroad or after coming into tighter contacts with foreign experts) the strong influence of the domestic tradition on their works which they never realized at the beginning of their artistic lives.

### Images of some concrete attributes of nature in Shu Ting's poetry

Beside the poems, in which Shu Ting directly describes natural sights, scenery and landscape, we can also find another category of describing nature in her poetry. There are poems in which there appear trees, flowers, ocean, or even animals. Yet we can notice that the poetry of Shu Ting as well as the ancient Chinese poetry of nature was never just describing nature. She often used the images of nature, such as leaves, trees, flowers, the sea or even some animals in a metaphorical sense. In these poems, there is a stronger influence of Western cultural tradition or the influence of modern Chinese poetry after 1919, when spoken language *baihua* started to be used not only as the common language but also in high literature.

As the poet said, when she started to write and publish her poems, there was not enough freedom to speak directly about some events in society; this was the reason why she used nature as a metaphor for human relationships. She was hiding the real meaning of her words to the image of nature. According to her words, in her poem *Boat* 船<sup>43</sup> written in that period, she felt very weak; she was

<sup>42</sup> My interview with Shu Ting on September 16, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> SHU TING. *Selected Poems*, transl. by Tao Tao Liu, p. 21. The original poem in Chinese In SHU TING. *Yi zhong biaoyan fengge, Shu Ting zi xuan shiji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集 [A Kind of Style of Playing, Shu Ting's Personal Selection of Poetry], pp. 9 – 10.

unemployed and this is the reason why she compared herself to the small boat.<sup>44</sup> Small, weak and beaten by destiny, a little boat became an allusion of the situation of the poet herself in these times as she felt it. Although this poem is not recounting just nature, I have chosen it because of the images of the ocean which present the nature there.

In the first stanza of the *Boat*, Shu Ting presents a damaged small boat helplessly lying on the seashore (A small boat 一只小船/For whatever reason 不知什么缘故/Lies marooned on its side on 倾斜地搁浅在/A desolate stony bank 荒凉的礁岸上) which is described as a hostile place without trees where even wild grass does not grow (There are no green trees to give shade 既没有绿树垂荫/Or grass willing to grow 连青草也不肯生长).

In the second stanza, she presents its impossibility to float. Floating on the waves of ocean is the purpose of the boat and also the main reason of its existence. A boat unable to float is useless; it is waiting for its decay on the seashore. The sea is so close but is unreachable for the small boat (The sea at high tide 满潮的海面/Is only a few yards away 只在离它几米的地方 /...Though the endless ocean 无垠的大海/Has domains far away 纵有辽远的疆城/In this vicinity 咫尺之内/It has lost its last strength 却丧失了最后的力量).

The small boat feels upset to be separated from the ocean; she wants to unite with it. The ocean here becomes the metaphoric image of love in a very wide sense as well as an image of freedom. (Across that eternal divide 隔着永恒距离 /Lost, they gaze at each other 他们怅然相望/Love crosses the boundary of life and death 爱情穿过生死的界限/And the vacancy of hundreds of years 世纪的空间). At the end of the poem there is the difference between the original poem and the literary translation. In the original poem in Chinese, the exact meaning of the last sentences is slightly different, so I am using my own translation.<sup>45</sup>

Does really deeply felt love

难道真挚的爱

Decay along with the boards of the boat

随着船板一起腐烂

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<sup>44</sup> My interview with Shu Ting on September 16, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> A translation from the original poem in Chinese, which is In SHU TING. *Yi zhong biao yan feng ge, Shu Ting zi xuan shi ji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集 [A Kind of Style of Playing, Shu Ting's Personal Selection of Poetry], pp. 9 – 10.

Will the fluttering soul

难道飞翔的灵魂

Really be imprisoned forever on the threshold of freedom

将终身临禁在自由的门槛

Here Shu Ting is using question-like sentences to which the expected answer is that deeply felt love will not decay along with the boat and the fluttering soul will not be imprisoned on the threshold of freedom; yet this is only the wish of the poet, which cannot be turned to an assurance as the translator did. In spite of the freedom of translation, here there is a shift of meaning.

When I visited Shu Ting at her home in Gulangyu in September 2011, and asked her about the main inspiration of her poetry, she told me that it was her homeland, the tropical climate, the sea, the sunshine, and the fact she had grown up on Gulangyu Island 鼓浪屿, which is a part of Xiamen in Fujian Province, and which is characterized by its Western style colonial architecture, which all became the scenery of her poems. The ocean or sea (it is the same word in Chinese) often appears in her poems. For example in *To the Ocean* 致大海<sup>46</sup> (The ocean's dawn 大海的日出/attracted so many heartfelt admirations of heroes 引起了多少英雄由衷的赞叹), the ocean is presented as a kind of endless universe melting all feelings. The sea as a symbol of freedom is mentioned also in the poem *Boat* above.

Beside the poems describing scenery we can find a lot of poems also close to nature. She is often writing about animals, trees and birds in using their images to voice her opinions and feelings. In the poem *White Swan* 白天鹅<sup>47</sup> she was writing about a swan which had been killed. But as we can see, the image of the swan is slowly transformed into the lyrical ego of the poet.

At the beginning of the poem, as is often seen in Shu Ting's poetry, there is something like a preface, a short text telling us the real facts. Here there is the information that one white swan has been killed by a human in Jade Lake Park (*Yuyuantan gongyuan* 玉渊潭公园), the park in Peking. It may be a sentence from a newspaper which became an inspiration initiating the author to write the

<sup>46</sup> SHU TING. *Yi zhong biao'yan fengge, Shu Ting zi xuan shiji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集 [A Kind of Style of Playing, Shu Ting's Personal Selection of Poetry], pp. 3 – 5.

<sup>47</sup> A translation from the original poem in Chinese, which is in SHU TING. *Yi zhong biao'yan fengge, Shu Ting zi xuan shiji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集 [A Kind of Style of Playing, Shu Ting's Personal Selection of Poetry], pp. 46 – 47.

poem. After that, in the following verses she expressed her negative attitude to some phenomenon in society, to commercialization, turning anything into money (Lowly merchants evaluate feathers... posters are looking for tourists 市侩估价羽毛... 海报寻求游客), and the empty arguing between educated people; she attacked vague symbols.

She feels disappointed by the reactions of common people to this event, or maybe to all evil events happening in that time; she is criticizing them because of their passivity, avoiding action:

If you can't resist it, so

如果你不能阻止，那么

Turn the other way!

转过身去!

Don't let me see

不要让我看见

Your passive anger and astonishment!

你们无所事事的愤怒与惊愕!

As we can notice in the following verses, this is the place where she started to personify herself as the swan. Though the view of the dead bird, which can be understood also as a kind of ideal and pure creature, she expressed her feelings.

The flying bird symbolizes freedom and the freedom in this poem might become a reason why the swan has been killed. Here she turns attention to her partners who were flying together with her before and she presents the wishes they are taught by gunshots to choose freedom. (Don't let my partners stay. 不要环流我的伙伴/When treetops stir up a lot of sharp signals, 当树梢挑起多刺的信号球/Let the sounds of gunshots teach them to choose freedom again. 让枪声教训他们重信选择自由). Although Shu Ting's poetry is considered as bearing much less political meaning than the poetry of other representatives of Misty poetry, such as Gu Cheng or Bei Dao, we can see she did not fully avoid some allusions, as is shown in the verses mentioned above.

Shu Ting here protests becoming an example (Don't turn me into an example 不要把我制成标本). She presents a strong image of a bloodstained swan, full of suffering. According to Kubin, bleeding is a very often used metaphor not only

in the poetry of Shu Ting but also in feminine poetry in the international context<sup>48</sup> (My wings were splattered with the warm drops of blood 我被击穿的双翼蜷在暖热的血滴中/Drops of blood are rolling in the dust, frozen to amber 血滴在尘埃里滚动, 冷却成琥珀). Perforated, broken wings are unable to fly again. After that, she turns to the future. It is obvious that the object of the poem had slowly changed from a real swan killed in Peking to the author's lyrical ego. Instead of a little bird growing up without its mother, she puts into our view an idea of a little child. She wishes that later, when the child will start dreaming his or her own dreams, it will not forget its mother.

Don't cry, my child

不要哭了, 孩子,

But one day, when you will want to change into:

当你有一天想变成为:

a cloud

一朵云、

A little rabbit, jumping and running,

一只蹦蹦跳跳的小兔子、

A boat with a white sail above a notepad

一艘练习本上的白帆船,

Don't forget me.

不要忘记我。

Shu Ting feels determined by the place she grew up, by the sea, by the picturesque beauty of southern China, even by Gulangyu, the island where she has been living since her childhood. As she said, she feels the responsibility of the human beings for the environment, the place where they live. Images of nature appearing in her poems often point to the south of Asia. In her poems, as

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<sup>48</sup> KUBIN, W. Writing with your Body: Literature as a Wound – Remarks on the Poetry of Shu Ting, p. 150.



for example *Baige* 白柯,<sup>49</sup> we can hardly even translate this into poetic Western language. *Lithocarpus dealbatus* is a kind of tree growing in east-southern Asia and I found its name only in Latin. This poem is in some way similar to *White Swan* mentioned above; it bears some features of environmental protection. At the beginning of the poem, she is describing two sole tanoaks<sup>50</sup> standing in the place of a forest where all the trees were cut down.

In the felled woodland

在被砍伐过的林地上

Two tanoaks

两株白柯

Shake away the memory of the axes' sounds;

把斧声的记忆从肩头抖落;

Later, the image of two trees starts to merge with the personal feelings of the author, and at the end there is the statement of the poet; but in this case her statement is more philosophical, she is speaking about the meaning of life (Life is a whirling dance /生命却旋舞着 – Up to the last ray of the setting sun 直到落日的脚灯, /It will enlighten the whole trees with the light of flying red swallows 将满树红色的飞燕照彻。It appears that more clearly language does not exist 似乎再没有一种更明了的语言 As that of these wild tanoaks I have chosen 像蛮荒所选择的这两株白柯).

In another poem, *To an Oak* 致橡树,<sup>51</sup> which I will mention below, we can also find images definitely proving that the author of this poem had grown up in the southern country surrounded by tropical vegetation. But the meaning of the poem has nothing to do with the southern landscape. Actually, it is a very powerful love song.

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<sup>49</sup> Translation from the original poem in Chinese, which is In SHU TING. *Yi zhong biao yan feng ge, Shu Ting zi xuan shiji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集 [A Kind of Style of Playing, Shu Ting's Personal Selection of Poetry], pp. 175 – 176.

<sup>50</sup> I am using the word *tanoak* in realizing that it is not completely the same gender of tree, but I feel it to be a better way than using its long name in Latin.

<sup>51</sup> An original poem in Chinese In SHU TING. *Yi zhong biao yan feng ge, Shu Ting zi xuan shiji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集 [A Kind of Style of Playing, Shu Ting's Personal Selection of Poetry], pp. 98 – 99. For a translation see SHU TING. *Selected Poems*. Transl. by Eva Hung, p. 260.

I found two translations of this poem by Julia C. Lin and Eva Hung. After a long hesitation, I selected the translation of Eva Hung<sup>52</sup> in *Renditions*, whose meaning is in my opinion closer to the meaning of the original, especially in the last stanzas of the poem.

In this poem Shu Ting explains her understanding of love. She wants to be very close to the beloved person, but she does not want to become his burden; she not want to be the trumpet creeper, which is a metaphor of women unable to stand on her own two legs, just depending on somebody (If I love you 如果我爱你 - / - I won't be like the trumpet creeper 决不像攀援的凌霄花/Flaunting itself on your tall branches 借你的高枝炫耀自己), or a love-sick bird, another symbol of weakness (I won't be like the love-sick bird, 决不学痴情的鸟儿 /Repeating to the green shade its monotonous song; 为绿荫重复单纯的歌曲) or even sunlight or spring rain, as they are different and unable to have a true understanding that can think or feel beloved. She is comparing herself to a kapok tree, a beautiful tropical tree with big flowers, standing by the side of her beloved (I must be a kapok tree by your side; 我必须是近旁的株木棉/In the image of a tree standing by you, 作为树的形象和你站在一起/Our roots clasped underground 根, 紧握在地下/Our leaves touching in the clouds 叶, 相触在云里).

The usual image of a woman as a vine clinging to a stout tree – where the tree is clearly the centre, the vine the margin – or to a steadfast rock can be traced to the Book of Songs (*Shijing* 诗经), of the eleventh to sixth centuries B.C. By contrast, Shu Ting depicts the woman as a tree that is both the same and different from the oak tree – as strong, but differently shaped and coloured. The role of the woman that she presents is equal and complementary to that of the man instead of being dependant and submissive.<sup>53</sup>

She wants them to be so close to each other, to be equal. Here she compares herself and her love to the two trees, masculine and feminine. The reason why she compared two lovers to two trees is that they have a lot of things in common; although there are some differences between them, they are not completely different like a tree and sunlight or rain. She compares the trunks of the oak, which present the masculine principle, to spears, knives and swords, and on the other side she likens the feminine part of a relationship to the beautiful big flowers of the kapok tree.

She presents love as a partnership of two independent individuals; she shows her will to share everything with her partner, all difficulties as well as all

<sup>52</sup> SHU TING. *Selected Poems*. Transl. by Eva Hung, p. 260.

<sup>53</sup> YEH, M. *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, p. xlvii.

happiness in life (We share the burdens of cold, storms, lightning; 我们分担寒潮、风雷、霹雳/ We share the joys of mists, vapours, rainbows 我们共享雾霭、流岚、虹霓).

In this poem Shu Ting presents her understanding of love and shows her ideal for relationships. She expresses here her belief in coequal love. In her eyes, lovers are two independent personalities who respect each other; they are in some ways different, but they are able to accept the differences of the beloved person. She does not care if anyone else would see their happiness, she thinks that maybe lovers would be considered as forever separated, but they are aware that they are standing close to each other (We may seem forever severed, 仿佛永远分离/But are life-long companions. 却又终身相依). She feels this constancy is the meaning of love (This is the greatest of love; 这才是伟大的爱情/This is constancy; 坚贞就在这里).

She presents her love as not being dependent only on the appearance of the other side; she loves the full personality, even the earth under his feet (I love not your robust form, 不仅爱你的伟岸的身躯/I love also the ground you hold, the earth you stand on. 也爱你的坚持的位置, 脚下的土地) It is a very sincere declaration of love.

As we can see from the few poems mentioned above, Shu Ting often uses personification for expressing her feelings. The same traces of personification are presented in the poem *The Singing Iris* 会唱歌的鸢尾花,<sup>54</sup> where she identifies herself with the singing iris. Even from this short part of the poem it is clearly visible that it is lyrical poem, or better said, a love poem. She became a singing iris stirring in the embrace of the beloved person; she wishes to be covered by his palm. She compares the breath of her lover to a soft breeze. The image of a jangling moon even stresses the romantic atmosphere of the poem filled with caressing emotions (In your embrace 在你的胸前/I've become a singing iris 我已变成了会唱歌的鸢尾花/Your breath a soft breeze that stirs me 你呼吸的轻风吹动我/Beneath the light of a jangling moon 在一片叮当响的月光下/Take your palm 用你宽宽的手掌/and cover me 覆盖我吧/for now 暂时).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> An original poem in Chinese In SHU TING. *Yi zhong biao'yan fengge, Shu Ting zi xuan shiji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集 [A Kind of Style of Playing, Shu Ting's Personal Selection of Poetry], pp. 64 – 72. For a translation, see SHU TING. *Selected Poems*. Transl. By Janice Wickeri, p. 48.

<sup>55</sup> There is a different order of verses in the original. In Chinese it is 暂时/覆盖我吧.

We can see the same features of personification in another poem, *Fallen Leaf* 落叶.<sup>56</sup> It is a long poem, so here it is presented only partially. In the first strokes of this poem there is mentioned spring scenery (When spring is everywhere 春天从四面八方/whispering in our ears 向我们耳语), but the motif of fallen leaves lets us feel the memories of winter and darkness, which seem to point us to sorrow. It seems that her relationship is influenced by something that happened in winter (but the fallen leaves underfoot suggest 而脚下的落叶却提示/the last winter guilt and darkened memories, 冬的罪证, 一种阴暗的记忆/shaking us deeply 深刻的震动/and making our eyes avoid meeting 是我们的目光互相回避).

In the following strokes, she is contemplating about the meaning of seasons in people's minds and the meaning of seasons for the trees. She has noticed that poems about fallen leaves can bring human beings some feelings, but they are irrelevant from the point of view of trees. For the tree, there is only one important thing to do: growing and not losing connection with the earth (Poems about fallen leaves and buds 落叶和新芽的诗/come out the thousands of lines. 有千百行/But a tree can have 书却应当只有/only one eternal theme: 一个永恒的主题: /"The free extension of oneself into sky, 为向天空自由伸展/never leaving earth. 我们决不离开大堤").

In the last stanza we can see the personification of the author with the fallen leaf. The sorrowful attitude of dying is stressed by mentioning the dark earth, the dirge of the wind. But the lyrical ego of the author is lying peacefully, waiting for something better; while not a joyful dream, there is still a hope which can bring her some kind of consolation (Suddenly I feel I am a fallen leaf, too, 我突然觉得: 我是一片落叶/Lying on the dark earth 躺在黑暗的泥土里/The wind might be a dirge for me. 风在为我举行葬仪/I wait peacefully 我安详地等待/For the green dream 那绿茸茸的梦/To gleam once again in my body. 从我山上取得第一线生机).

At last but not at least, I would like to point to one of her latest poems written after 1989. *White Crane* 白鹤<sup>57</sup> dated 1996, from one point of view bears some features of Chinese tradition in the image of the mystic bird flying south, but the whole context of this poem is connected much more with the Western poetry of

<sup>56</sup> An original poem in Chinese In SHU TING. *Yi zhong biaoyan fengge, Shu Ting zi xuan shiji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集 [A Kind of Style of Playing, Shu Ting's Personal Selection of Poetry], p. 29. For a translation see SHU TING. *Selected Poems*. Transl. by Gordon Oving & De-an Wu Swihart, pp. 34 – 35.

<sup>57</sup> A translation from the original poem in Chinese In SHU TING. *Yi zhong biaoyan fengge, Shu Ting zi xuan shiji* 一种表演风格, 舒婷自选诗集, pp. 297 – 298.

modernism than with traditional Chinese poetry. Although there are some similarities between the mystic bird and the white crane, stressed by the author in the verses, there is a point of reality. Shu Ting describes real white cranes flying towards Poyang Lake. This lake, located in Jiangxi Province, is the largest freshwater lake in China. During the winter, the lake becomes home to a large number of migrating Siberian cranes, up to 90% of which spend the winter there.<sup>58</sup> In looking to the poem, her verses are metaphors used for that place; the whole style of writing is the poem of a contemporary author with only slight allusions of Chinese myths.

When I started to translate it I had serious troubles getting the right meaning of this poem. She let us follow her images and feelings of suffering. Is this poem about eternity? Is it an eternity of suffering or is it possible to escape from the suffering? These questions appeared at the beginning of my translation. This poem is quite different from the other poems mentioned here, where the symbolic meaning is usually clear. This poem is much deeper and more difficult to analyse than the other poems above; it much more philosophical, too. From here we can see the process of how the style of the author has changed over a period of about sixteen years.

We can feel the cold atmosphere of Siberia, mentioned also for the absence of freedom, a famous place for prisoners. At the beginning of the poem, we can see the same small prosaic introduction to the poem as has been noticed in the above poem *White Swan*. Afterwards the author turns her attention to the cruel, cold, despaired country without even a hint of relief, which is for thousands of years the homeland of white cranes which come to Poyang Lake to spend winter there. (Marsh, suffering and cold 苦寒的沼泽地/The resonating song of prisoners from Siberia 西伯利亚嘹亮的囚歌/Sixty million ecliptic springs and summers 六千万个椭圆春夏/They are all dead spirits in shells 俱是带壳的灵魂/Breeding flurries of big snow like goose feathers 孵化一场鹅毛大雪/Bloating down in China 飘落到中国/to the unfreezing Lake Poyang 不结冰的鄱阳湖.)

Here the poem continues with poetic images layering one on another, and we cannot really get the exact identification of its meaning. The only thing we can do is enjoy the beauty of these images. This can mean that the crane never forgets the cold, although its memory collapsed into the beautiful lake covered by the red colour of the sunset's sun, as the people cannot forget the suffering (Soaked in sunset 饱蘸/the reed along the bank was splattered red 芦苇淅淅沥沥沿岸描红/the sky voluntarily destroyed the road 天空自行销毁道路/one's memory provisionally collapsed into the lake between the fishes with thin scales

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<sup>58</sup> Available from < [http://www.globalnature.org/docs/02\\_vorlage.asp](http://www.globalnature.org/docs/02_vorlage.asp)>.

记忆暂时瓦解为细鯪的湖鱼), but the mention of predestined fate and the cold flow never forgetting its mother language implies that the crane has to go back to cruel Siberia because it is its homeland (in a flash there appeared their predestined fate 拈指演绎劫数/the cold flow coming from the never forgotten mother language 寒流来自永不忘怀的母语). They still turn their necks towards the north, the place where they usually live (when the grass is moving in the wind 一有风吹草动/it still turns to the north every night 仍然夜夜举颈朝北). People are the same; they cannot forget their motherland even if it is a place bringing them only suffering.

In the strokes of the last stanza she lets us imagine the dignified human being, who despite his contemplations can still be defamed by something as low as an insect, but he was scornfully labelled a gilded cloud, something beautiful but flowing, quickly changing, without an exact shape, something ephemeral. It can point to the shortness of human life which is a motif often appearing in Chinese poetry.

The dignified king is deep in contemplation

高贵的王者逆光疑思

Even though he does not spurn babbling

不屑侈谈 被

A fly labelled him

蜉蝣诋毁为

a gilded cloud

一朵烫金的云

This poem is much more philosophical than her earlier poems; the sincerity of her first works is replaced here by a deeper sense. Instead of the richness of feelings there appear more layers of content, a variety of allusions and a perplexity of metaphors.

### Conclusion

In conclusion we can see that images of nature appear often in Shu Ting's poetry. She uses images of nature mostly in a metaphorical sense to express her feelings, love, sorrow, the melancholy of passing time, her struggle for freedom

and other emotions. Her landscape poems are in some way influenced by the Chinese landscape tradition, but the sources of her inspiration are found more in the poetry of romantics and in the Chinese poetry from the 1920s and 1930s. The aim of her landscape poems is mostly not in just describing the scenery; she expresses her feelings to human beings. Besides the landscape poems, we can find in a large amount of Shu Ting's poetry images of nature, trees, flowers and animals. She often expresses a wide range of feelings and uses personification to change the object of her poems into her lyrical ego. Her poetry is always personal and full of tender, gentle emotions; her poems are very feminine, but not feminist. Instead of speaking loudly, she whispers her poems as if they were written just for herself, but maybe because of this her poetry have found plenty of admirers in China.

Landscape and nature, although it is not her core theme, has its certain place in Shu Ting's poetry. In describing nature she express her feelings, she often uses personification and allusions to compare the human beings to the trees and animals. At the beginning in describing nature she found the way to say something, what she could not say directly, which has turned to using metaphors connected to nature as an inseparable part of her poetic language.

In mentioning traditional Chinese landscape poetry, we can see in the poetry of Shu Ting that she has some common features with traditional Chinese poetry. These features seem to be more unconscious. As the author said, she has been influenced by tradition more from the very early education in her family when she was a little girl and her parents taught her to memorize ancient poems as they were in most educated families. It is still common even in present days that Chinese children besides nursery rhythms use to learn by heart plenty of short poems from the Tang Dynasty (*Tang shi* 唐诗) from different authors. This way, in repeating the short melodic texts, they absorb a certain amount of Chinese culture before fully understanding its meaning. In such a way, she absorbed a lot of traditional Chinese poetry and aesthetics even without realizing it herself. The influence of her family would from that point be much more important for her later creative process than her scholarly education, as her formal education in school was interrupted by the events of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>59</sup> She certainly is a contemporary poet using poetic language and the structure of poems without the direct influence or great impact of ancient Chinese poetry. Although she takes her inspiration much more from romantic poetry as well as from Western poetry rather than from the New Poetry in China, her poems are formally based on the tradition of modernism or romantics; she is rooted in some subtle way in

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<sup>59</sup> My interview with Shu Ting on September 16, 2011.

ancient tradition, but it should be stressed that the traces of this tradition do not appear very much in every poem.

As is visible from her poems, Shu Ting has had experience of suffering, but unlike some Western female poets the suffering in her mind never extended beyond that which she was able to endure. Although she has been injured, she has always been able to heal herself from her wounds. She is a Chinese poet, bearing a long tradition of poetry in which authors used to express their feelings through describing nature. She let her sorrow be blown away like a falling leaf by the wind, be scoured by the sea waves, and changed it into beautiful melancholic scenery. Her poetry reflects the feminine world full of emotions, recovering her from the wounds of life.

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