

LYRICISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS: EXPLORING THREE DIMENSIONS OF MODERN CHINESE POETICS*

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Viewed in hindsight, *shuqingzhuyi* 抒情主義 “Lyricism” as a discursive practice is notorious in modern Chinese poetics. Both romanticists and realists, preachers of *chunshi* 純詩 “Pure Poetry” and advocates of *dazhonghua shige* 大眾化詩歌 “Popular Poetry” have been obsessed with lyricism. From the late 1920s upward, however, so many dissidents cast doubts on the validity of lyricism that *fanshuqingzhuyi* 反抒情主義 “anti-lyricism” became prevalent. Last but not least, the 1930s – 1940s witnessed the appearance of *shendu shuqing* 深度抒情 the “deep lyrical” in the literary arena, which tended to undermine lyricism from a different hermeneutic framework. So far the scholarship in this field remains scanty although modern Chinese poetics invites a thorough treatment of the three dimensions; this paper is an attempt to investigate the above issues in hopes of expanding the critical horizon for the study of modern Chinese poetics.

Key words: lyricism, anti-lyricism, deep lyric

Defining Lyricism in Modern Chinese Context

In the wake of *Wusi xinwenxue yundong* 五四新文學運動 the May Fourth Literary Movement, *shuqingxing* 抒情性 lyricity was discovered and *shuqing shi* 抒情詩 lyric poetry rapidly gained popularity. Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885 – 1967), Zhou Wu 周無 (周太玄, (1895 – 1968), Kang Baiqing 康白情 (1895 – 1959) and Liang Shiqiu 梁實秋 (1903 – 1987) all stated that “*Shi shi zhuqing de wenxue* 詩是主情的文學 Poetry is a kind of emotion-oriented literature.”¹ Zhou

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¹ZHOU, Wu 周無. *Shi de jianglai i* 詩的將來 [The Future of Poetry]; KANG, Baiqing 康白情. *Xinshi di wojian* 新詩底我見 [My View of New Poetry], pp. 1 – 14; LIANG, Shiqiu 梁實秋. *Cao-er pinglun* 《草兒》評論 [Critique of Grass], pp. 69 – 108.

elevated lyricism from rhetorical device to poetic ontology, confessing that: “As far as the techniques of new poetry are concerned, I do not quite fancy the simple and straightforward style of writing, neither do I like verbose narrative; not mentioning the reasoning; I just believe that lyricism is part and parcel of poetry.”² Writers of *Xinyue pai* 新月派 the New Crescent Society and *Chuangzao she* 創造社 The Creation Society were so infatuated with lyricism that in 1926 Liang Shiqiu went so far as to allege that “Modern Chinese literature is penetrated universally by lyricism.”³ In the midst of rising individualism, “Lyric poetry” was esteemed as an appropriate vehicle for conveying subjective feelings, personal experiences, and even mysterious fantasy,⁴ as evidenced by 施蛰存 Shi Zhecun (1905 – 2003), Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 (1905 – 1950), and Jin Kemu 金克木 (1912 – 2000). Meanwhile the authors of *Puluo shige* 普羅詩歌 “Proletarian Poetry” and *Guofang shige* 國防詩歌 “National Defense Poetry” attempt to unbind lyric poetry from pure subjectivity, self-fashioning it as an integral part of nationalist literature. From the *Jiuyiba shibian* 九一八事變 “September 18 Incident” through the eight-year Sino-Japanese War, the appeal of the *kangzhan shuqing shi* 抗戰抒情詩 “Anti-Japanese War lyrics” and the *Dazhong shuqing shi* 大眾抒情詩 “popular lyric poetry” proved an irresistible tide. During the 1940s, Zhong Jingwen 鐘敬文 (1903 – 2002) affirmed that “the logic of poetry” is equivalent to “the logic of feelings”, and Hu Feng extolled the *zhuguan zhandou jingshen* 主觀戰鬥精神 “passion for subjective fight” as the most important creative mode. Apparently lyricism crystalized as the underlying basis of modern Chinese poetry; in addition to romanticists and realists who naturally cherished lyricism, even modernists characterized their poems as “lyricism-centred.”

Undeniably the term *shuqingzhuyi* 抒情主義 was not first coined by Liang Shiqiu. Jiao Juyin 焦菊隱 (1905 – 1975), Zheng Boqi 鄭伯奇 (1895 – 1979), Mu Mutian 穆木天 (1900 – 1971), Xu Chi 徐遲 (1914 – 1996), Ai Qing 艾青 (1910 – 1996), Zang Kejia 臧克家 (1905 – 2004), Hu Mingshu 胡明樹 (1914 – 1977), Hu Feng 胡風 (1902 – 1985), have all used this term and shed light on issues relating to new poetry, though in different ways.

A brief etymological investigation of “lyricism” suggests that it carries at least the following connotations. First, it signifies an inclination towards romanticized emotionalism, emphasizing the spontaneity and originality of feelings. Jiao Juyin drew upon Kuriyagawa Hakuson’s 厨川白村 (1880 – 1923)

² ZHOU, Zuoren 周作人. Yangbianji xu 揚鞭集序 [Preface to Raising the Whip]. In his *Tan Long ji* 談龍集 [*On the Dragon*], p. 68.

³ LIANG, Shiqiu 梁實秋. Xiandai zhongguo wenxue zhi langman de qushi 現代中國文學之浪漫的趨勢 [Trends of Romanticism of Modern Chinese Literature]. In his *Langman de yu gudian de* 浪漫的與古典的 [*The Romantic and the Classic*], p. 16.

⁴ ARAC, J. Afterword: Lyric Poetry and the Bounds of New Criticism. In HOSEK, C. and PARKER, P. (eds.) *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, p. 353.

narratives to define the style of his own poems as “being extremely subjective, resistant against cool reasoning and form, full of unbridled fantasy, and thus constituting a sort of lyricist literature.”⁵ In a review of Yu Dafu’s novels, Zheng Boqi held that modern China lacked the ideological and social background of Western countries, therefore, “in the early years of the New Literary Movement, what [was] produced was not the Western romanticism of the 19th-century, but a lyricism unique to the 20th-century China.” He also proclaimed that “Lyricism is the most fitting term considering the characteristics of the current literary scene.”⁶ Nevertheless, if this lyric impulse is not balanced by rationality, and constrained by morality, it will be reduced to sentimentality; this is the view of Liang Shiqiu and Rao Mengkan 饒孟侃 (1902 – 1967). In this regard, lyricism is the Chinese equivalent of Western emotionalism or sentimentalism.

Second, viewed historically, lyricism was frequently politicized and ideologicalized. In the eyes of left-wing writers and popularists, romantic poetry or “pure poetry” was in essence pathetic *Geren shuqingzhuyi* 個人抒情主義 “personal lyricism.” Hu Feng argues that one of the literary manifestations of semi-feudal and semi-colonial “Fascist literature and art” was that “it takes advantage of the routine nature of social relationships with total disregard for war and encourage feudal lyricism arisen from the decadent social life.”⁷ Popularists and realists attributed rampant “lyricism” to the mistaken outlooks of certain writers on art who considered literature to be language games and day-dreamer’s monologues, arguing that some writers did not interact with the masses in any significant manner and indulged in self-admiration out of individualism. This view was shared by Ai Qing, Mu Mutian, Hu Feng and Zang Kejia among others.⁸

Third, unlike the above personages, modernists refused to regard “feelings and emotions alone” as the nature and life of poetry; they rejected the practice of linking lyricism to the writers’ outlook on life and the world; rather, they firmly believed that flawed poetics was responsible for the flood of lyricism. According to them, neither romantic expression of feelings nor the enthusiastic

⁵ JIAO, Juyin 焦菊隱. *Zaiban zixu 《夜哭》再版自序* [Foreword to Reprint]. In JIAO, Juyin. *Yeku* 焦菊隱 [Weeping at Night].

⁶ ZHENG, Boqi 鄭伯奇. *Hanhuiji’ piping 《寒灰集》批評* [Critique of Cold Ashes], p. 378.

⁷ See HU, Feng 胡風. *Lun xiansh zhuyi de lu 論現實主義的路* [On the Path of Realism], *Diyi zhang: cong xianshi kaishi 第一章: 從現實開始* [Chapter 1: Beginning with the Reality].

⁸ MU, Mutian 穆木天. *Jianli minzu geming de shishi de wenti 建立民族革命的史詩的問題* [Issues on Building Epics for National Revolution], p. 961; AI, Qing 艾青 *Shi lun 詩論* [Essays on Poetry], pp. 14 – 15; ZANG, Kejia 臧克家. *Shao xiang dianer shi! 少像點兒詩!* [Be Less Like Poems!], p. 122.

praises by the popularist could evade the flaws in “lyricism”: the originally subjective experience is not successfully transformed into an artistic experience, and no suitable objective correlatives were identified for the feelings of the subject; thus, both became the victims of ideology and sentimentalism.

The Articulation of Lyricism & Its Limits

In modern China, the recognition of the lyrical nature of poetry was a historical process, in which *chunshihua* 純詩化 “pure-poeticization” discourse clashed with *dazhonghua* 大眾化 “popularization” discourse.⁹ In a retrospective article regarding new poetry, Zhu Ziqing makes an insightful comment: “After metrical verses, poetry was primarily concerned with the expression of feelings, which was a return to its roots. After symbolic poems, poetry was all about the expression of feelings in the pure sense of the term, which was a perfect move back to its roots.”¹⁰ In 1918, Yu Pingbo 俞平伯 (1900 – 1990) put forth three criteria for writing “vernacular poetry”, of which only one single sentence is related to “feelings”: he states that “expression of feelings must be genuine”.¹¹ On his way to Britain to study in January 1920, Yu wrote to his associates of *Xinchao She* 新潮社 The New Tide Society, revealing how his interest had shifted from objective description to emotional expression:

My opinion of the practice of poetry has changed a little bit. I feel that poetry has been too descriptive, which is indeed not a desirable trend. This is because no matter how wonderful they are, purely objective descriptions do not make good poems, although it seems perfectly understandable to dabble in descriptiveness once in a while. Such a task should be left to photographers. The primary responsibility of poets is to reflect life in a sincere and lively manner; they should use nature and human society as the background and take their subjective emotions and imagination as the framework to harmonize the two,

⁹ Here, “pure poeticization 純詩化 does not refer to the “Pure Poetry” Movement in modern Europe, as a kind of literary fact, the latter is distinct by tone, symbol, hint, and subconsciousness; rather, in modern Chinese context, it is developed to be a critical term to encompass all the poetic discourses emphasizing aesthetic autonomy, as expounded by Zhu Ziqing 朱自清.

¹⁰ ZHU, Ziqing 朱自清. *Kangzhan yu Shi* 抗戰與詩 [The Anti-Japanese War and Poetry]. In his *Xinshi zahua* 新詩雜話 [Miscellaneous Remarks on New Poetry], p. 345.

¹¹ YU, Pingbo 俞平伯. *Baihua shi de san da tiaojian* 白話詩的三大條件 [Three Criteria of Vernacular Poetry], p. 331.

*focusing them on a certain point, so as to present readers a vivid image.*¹²

An inclination towards lyricism is revealed here. Ten months later, Yu unequivocally stated that “poetry is inspired by feelings or emotions; intellect and thoughts look insignificant.”¹³ A month later, he gladly proclaimed that “Lately, the style of new poetry has expanded from purely objective descriptions to including subjective expression, which is something delightful.”¹⁴ On different occasions Kang Baiqing 康白情 (1895 – 1959) reiterated that “Emotion is the distinct attribute of poetry”; “Poetry is a sort of emotions-oriented literature; it is impossible to compose a piece of poem without emotions, and even when there are emotions, the poem can never be good if the emotions are not plentiful”; “Poetry is literature about emotions; poets are the lovers of the universe; thus, to write poems, one must be adept at fostering emotions.”¹⁵ Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892 – 1978) viewed literature as “a purely emotional world” and believed that “Poetry is direct expression of emotions,”¹⁶ a statement that was subsequently changed to “Lyric poetry is direct expression of emotions.”¹⁷ Talking about *xiaoshi* 小詩 short/shorter poem, Zhou Zuoren recognized the inclination towards lyricism, saying that “Poetry in essence is something that *yanzhi* 言志 ‘speaks the mind’; although it’s acceptable to use narration or reasoning, poetry is essentially the expression of emotions.”

When conceptualizing lyricism, the critics adopted different argumentation modes. Sometimes, the boundary between poetry and prose accounts for this issue, which may be traced to Hegel’s *Aesthetics* where he regards poetry and prose as the two ways for human beings to grasp the world. There are numerous examples in this regard. Some people followed the Italian theorist Benedetto Croce’s (1866 – 1952) approach to expound the characteristics of arts (poetry included) by comparing “intuitive knowledge” with “logical knowledge”. Other people elaborated on the nature of poetry by comparing poetry with

¹² YU, Pingbo 俞平伯. Yu Xinchao she zhu xiong tanshi 與新潮社諸兄談詩 [Discussions with New Tide Society Colleagues about Poetry], pp. 844 – 845.

¹³ YU, Pingbo 俞平伯. Zuoshi de yidian jingyan 做詩的一點經驗 [Certain Experience in Writing Poems]. In Yu Pingbo quanji 俞平伯全集 [The Complete Works of Yu Pingbo], p. 519.

¹⁴ YU, Pingbo 俞平伯. Shi di ziyou he pubian 詩底自由和普遍 [The Freedom and Universality of Poetry], p. 75.

¹⁵ KANG, Baiqing 康白情. Xinshi di wojian 新詩底我見 [My View of New Poetry], pp. 1 – 14.

¹⁶ GUO, Moruo 郭沫若. Wenxue de benzhi 文學的本質 [Nature of Literature], p. 10.

¹⁷ GUO, Moruo 郭沫若. Lun jiezou 論節奏 [On Rhythm], p. 8.

philosophy/sciences. In 1920, Kang Baiqing regarded “knowledge” and “poetry” as being poles apart. By 1921, Yang Zhensheng 楊振聲 (1890 – 1956) voiced his views on lyricism by comparing “literature” with “knowledge”; Fang Guangtao 方光燾 (1898 – 1964) and Li Changzhi 李長之 (1910 – 1978) defined the authenticity of poetry using the dichotomy of feelings/reason. Drawing upon Winchester’s theory, Yu Dafu classified “feelings” into “emotions” and “sentiments”, affirming that “The essence of poetry all lies in feelings, and among the feelings, emotion is the most important.”¹⁸ Wen Yiduo, who also adopted this classification, overstated that eighty to ninety percent of the poems in *Winter Night* by Yu Pingbo expressed *erliu de qingcao* 二流的情操 “second-rate sentiments.” What discouraged him completely was the fact that the book devoted insufficient space to describe “the most passionate, truest and highest love” between man and woman.¹⁹ Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾 (1897 – 1984) compared feelings and reason to reveal his own views on literature: “The quality of a poem depends on the depth of emotions expressed, and the richness of feelings should be used as the criterion for each sentence and word used.”²⁰ Obviously, “feelings” became an exclusive concept and was elevated to an unbelievable status in the standoff against other elements. Zhong Jingwen 鐘敬文 (1903 – 2002) coined the term *qingxu donglixue* 情緒動力學 “emotional dynamics.” In Zhong’s essay “Shi de luoji” 詩的邏輯 “The Logic of Poetry,” he summarized the main characteristics of poetry as “emotionality” and “subjectivity.”²¹ In the pre-war poetic arena, Yu Gengyu 于廣虞 (1902 – 1963) should be credited for digging most deeply into “purely poeticized” lyricism as he wrote at least ten essays elaborating on the central issue of “poetry as the art of emotional outpouring.”²² By and large, “purely poeticized” or “romanticized” lyricism recognized individuals’ feelings as the origin, motivation and nature of poetry, and the expression of feelings as a universal and perpetual quality.

As a matter of fact, “popularists” also embraced lyricism. The advocates of popular poetry freed lyricism from aesthetic autonomy, incorporating social references into poetry; shifted towards “popularization”; and pushed for “social feelings” or “typical emotions.” In the late 1920s, Zheng Boqi became an advocate of proletarian poetry. With regard to lyricism, he stated that “The contents of poetry are feelings, feelings on fire.” However, such lyricism served

¹⁸ YU, Dafu 郁達夫. Shi de neirong 詩的內容 [On the Contents of Poetry], p. 19.

¹⁹ WEN, Yiduo 聞一多, LIANG, Shiqiu 梁實秋. *Dongye Cao-er pinglun* 冬夜草兒評論 [Critique of Winter Night and Grass], pp. 48 – 55.

²⁰ CHENG, Fangwu 成仿吾. Shi zhi fangyuzhan 詩之防禦戰 [Defensive Warfare of Poetry], p. 2.

²¹ ZHONG, Jingwen 鐘敬文. Shi de luoji 詩的邏輯 [Logic of Poetry]. In his *Lanchuang shilun ji* 蘭窗詩論集 [Orchid Window Collection of Poetry Essays], pp. 90 – 91.

²² XIE, Zhixi 解志熙, WANG WENJIN 王文金 (eds.) *Yu Gengyu shiwen Jicun* 于廣虞詩文輯存 [Collection of Poems by Yu Gengyu], Vol. 2.

the dissemination of “truth” in the ideological realm, when “truth” originated from poets’ contact with the living world. Zheng made a straightforward appeal for poets to get involved in political reforms.²³ Zang Kejia compared feelings to *xuemai* 血脈 the “lifeline” of poetry and expressed his discontent with the two ailments plaguing the poetic scene – *Shi de pinxue yu ganqing de fanlan* 詩的貧血與感情的氾濫 “the anemia of poetry and the unrestraint of feelings”.²⁴ Wang Yaping 王亞平 (1905 – 1983) pointed out that the perfectness of “new poetry” depended on the application of lyricism, and argued that “The single biggest flaw of Chinese poetry is the poets’ inability to grasp their feelings.”²⁵ Huang Yaomian 黃藥眠 (1903 – 1987) stressed that, compared with thought and theory, “feelings” had greater spontaneity and originality, and unleashed staggering energy in reflecting the breadth and depth of real life, and that the epistemological value of feelings could be deeply embedded into the internal order of things to transform theory into practice.²⁶ For example, *Zhan Ge* 戰歌 *Songs of War*, a poem by Ren Jun 任鈞 (1909 – 2003), contains an outspoken confession: “In my poems, there are no personal sorrows or joys, but collective emotions.”²⁷ Mu Mutian held that “during the Anti-Japanese War, a true poet must use long lyrics to convey our feelings about the war and the new nation through great realistic images.” In addition, he put forth the proposition of *dianxing de qingxu* 典型的情緒 “typical emotions”²⁸ and the concept of *kangzhan shuqing shi* 抗戰抒情詩 “Anti-Japanese War Lyrics.” Clearly, popularists tended to shift the concerns from “aesthetic” to writers’ “identity” and viewed the reformation of individuals as the basis for any successful cultural innovations. While emphasizing the reformation of one’s outlook on life and the world, they sometimes resorted to personal attacks, self-righteousness and a sense of moral superiority, forfeiting unavoidably the opportunities to ponder the poetry itself.

²³ ZHENG, Boqi 鄭伯奇. *Shige duanxiang* 詩歌斷想 [Musings on Poetry], p. 648.

²⁴ ZANG, Kejia 臧克家. *Shi de xuemai* 詩的血脈 [Veins of Poetry], p. 2.

²⁵ WANG, Yaping 王亞平. *Shi de qinggan: xinshi biancao zhi shi* 詩的情感——新詩辨草之十 [Emotions of Poetry – New Poetry Elucidation], No. 10, p. 29.

²⁶ HUANG, Yaomian 黃藥眠. *Lun Shi* 論詩 [On Poetry], pp. 39 – 40.

²⁷ Cited from YA, Ping 亞萍. *Xin shiji de shige yundong* 新世紀的詩歌運動 [Poetry Movement in the New Century], p. 66.

²⁸ MU, Mutian 穆木天. *Shige Chuangzuo shang de biao xian xing shi de wenti* 詩歌創作上的表現形式的問題 [Issues Concerning the Forms of Expression in Poetry Writing]. In CHEN, Dun 陳惇, LIU, Xiangyu 劉象愚 (eds.) *Mu Mutian wenxue pinglun xuanji* 穆木天文學評論選集 [Selected Literary Reviews of Mu Mutian], pp. 125 – 130.

How Is “Anti-Lyricism” Possible?

In 1936, Ke Ke 柯克 (Jin Kemu 金克木, 1912 – 2000) named a new kind of poem *zhuzhi shi* 主智詩 “intellectual poetry”, proclaiming that it represented a fresh path in the development of “new poetry.” He believed that the first characteristic of “intellectual poetry” was the replacement of direct expression of feelings with “intellect as the critical factor” *yi zhe wei zhu nao* 以智為主腦, but as it did not originate from a logical inference in philosophy, it invariably aimed to invoke “the most direct feelings”; this dictated that the second characteristic must be a “combination of feelings and intellect.” Ke argued that the third characteristic of the “anti-lyricist” new poetry was that it required readers to have the same level of intellect as the author, and therefore the “intellectual poetry” tended to be obscure and hard to understand for popular readers. In his efforts to identify the fourth characteristic, Ke opted for a historical approach to establish a logical link between the richness of scientific knowledge and the rise of “intellectual poetry”:

In fact, intellect is not entirely innate, and the advancement of thought is helped by knowledge in various fields. The rapid development of new sciences in the recent two or three decades may be just a beginning, but a fresh outlook on the universe has started to show its prospects. The recognition of new mathematics (non-Euclidean geometry), the great combination of new astronomy and new physics, and everything, from something as big as the universe to something as small as electrons, can become a new scope or new subject of research. Human understanding of the macrocosm has expanded to an incredible level, and the emergence of the Theory of Relativity will undoubtedly lead to a significant transformation of human mind, if man is to settle down and think in the future. Moreover, we should not forget that this is just the beginning. Philosophers have yet to construct an innovative system, and at present, there are just a few astrophysicists trying to describe the new universe with new philosophy. At this point, apart from philosophy, there are two descriptive methods – mathematic and poetic. As such, those who want to write this kind of new intellectual poems must, above all, know something about the new realm under the light of the new science; otherwise, even strenuous musing might just produce something shoddy, something that would have been rejected by our forefathers. On the other hand, chaos and conflicts in modern politics and economics led to rapid changes and complication of culture, seriously compounding and shaking modern people’s psyche and outlook on life. Therefore, “new poetry” writers should reflect the new life without neglecting their circumstances and should have an analytical

*understanding and generalization of other people/matters; otherwise, the poems would become shallow and dull.*²⁹

The impact of science upon the Romantic Movement was first openly discussed in British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead's (1861 – 1947) book, *Science and the Modern World*. Recent studies by a U.S. scholar also suggest that “this crucial development in scientific and philosophical materialism coincides historically with the emergence of modernism in literature and the arts.”³⁰ Ke Ke was not a stranger to scientific knowledge. When he was young, he dabbled in astronomy and translated a book on this topic. He detected the anti-lyricism and intellectual trends in modern Chinese poetry, but he didn't treat “Intellectual Poems,” “Emotional Poems,” and “Feelings-based Poems” differently; neither did he oppose lyricism with an “outspoken stance” as most Western modernists had done.

Xu Chi 徐遲 (1914 – 1996), an established modernist in Shanghai intellectual circles, was much more radical than Ke Ke. In May 1935, Xu published a notorious article *Shuqing de fangzhu* 抒情的放逐 *The Exile of Lyricism*, voicing his overall rejection of “lyricism”. In no time, he came under criticism by Chen Canyun 陳殘雲 (1914 – 2002), Mu Dan 穆旦 (1918 – 1977), Ai Qing 艾青, Zhou Gangming 周鋼鳴 (1909 – 1981), Hu Weizhou 胡危舟, Lin Huanping 林煥平 (1911 – 2000), Xi Jin 錫金 (1915 – 2003), Wu He 伍禾 (1913 – 1968), Hu Feng 胡風, and Ah Long 阿壘 (1907 – 1967). Xu argued that “poetry” was not something abstract that transcended time and space; rather, it had the ability to adapt itself to changes in human history and culture. He also held that scientific development and metropolitan experience were the primary causes of the abandonment of “lyricism” by people, and that in recognition of this point; T. S. Eliot subconsciously exiled lyricism from his poems, followed by C. S. Lewis, W. S. Auden and Stephen Spender. In view of this, Xu was longing for “the exile of lyricism” to appear in current China:

Although people might get used to a life without the expression of feelings, they might never get used to poetry without the expression of feelings. I think it is a great opportunity to illustrate this point with the current war. For hundreds of years, we have never lacked elegance or lyric, and no one has ever dared to belittle elegance or be disrespectful towards lyricism. Nevertheless, as the war goes on, even you are opposed to a sentimental life. Even if they were forced to flee their hometown, their loved ones were killed, and all their belongings were destroyed in the war, people's reaction

²⁹ KE, Ke柯克. Lun zhongguo xinshi de xin tujing 論中國新詩的新途徑 [On the New Approach to China's New Poetry], pp. 467 – 468.

³⁰ TIFFANY, D. *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric*, p. 213.

*is resentment or other feelings, but by no means sentimentality. This is because if you felt sentimental, it means you were about to have your last breath. Perhaps in exile you are fascinated by the landscapes that you have never seen before, but the scope and intensity of the war have repeatedly dampened our enthusiasm for expressing our feelings. You had always felt that the landscapes were full of feelings, but all these no longer make any sense. Many people have died in the bombings, so has the desire to express our feelings, but poetry has survived. Her responsibility is to describe our never-say-die spirit. You may think about how we should compose poetry.*³¹

In Xu's opinion, "lyricism" equaled the expression of sentimental feelings and individualism, as reflected in numerous classical Chinese poems and in the new poetry since the May 4th Literary Movement. This viewpoint was largely the same as the understanding by Mu Mutian, Zang Kejia and Hu Feng, among others. The only difference lay in the fact that Xu Chi followed Eliot's modernist stance to exile lyricism to improve the quality of poetry, whereas other critics embraced "popular" lyricism. Xu's appeal for "the exile of lyricism" was slightly distinct from the doctrines of Western theorists in that he was starting to accept a notion that poetry was no longer a language game leading to feelings and imagination; rather, it was a socially symbolic action of the modern subject. Poetry and the public world should closely interact with each other; not only had historical transformations stimulated the changes of lyricism in "new poetry," but anti-lyricism had become the precondition for reforming the current world (paradoxically, this echoes the voice of "new poetry popularization").

Ke Ke and Xu Chi's viewpoints were inherited and advanced by the budding poet Hu Mingshu 胡明樹 (1914 – 1977). Hu reiterated the influence of booming scientific knowledge on modern poetry, and conveyed an appeal for the diversity of genres. He confessed that "The lyric, which is primarily concerned with feelings, is the most developed form of poetry, and among the lyrics, love poetry is most popular." The reason for this is self-evident: poets, especially young writers, have an innate ability to "express feelings," whereas epics and satires require a combination of learning, knowledge, and observations, as well as character cultivation and life experience. However, the evolution of human history and incorporation of scientific elements made the rejecting of lyricism an irreversible trend:

Society has evolved, science has advanced, and literature has grown. In particular, in the era of science in the 20th century, literature will inevitably be influenced by science and more scientific elements (reasoning,

³¹ XU, Chi徐遲. Shuqing de fangzhu 抒情的放逐 [The Exile of Lyricism]. In *Xingdao ribao* 星島日報 *Singtao Daily*, May 13, 1939.

intellectual, analytical, and integrated) will seep in. This will be something sad for lyricism and for poets making a living by selling “feelings”! This is because “feelings” can never become a decisive factor for poetry, lyrical elements can be minimized in “non-lyric poetry,” and the literature of scientism will inevitably be anti-emotionalist or anti-lyricist (but not anti-feelings or anti-lyric). Lyricist poets who use “feelings” as a magic weapon, what would you do if your “feelings” were deprived or if you failed to sell your feelings?³²

Lyricists acclaimed “feelings” as ontological being, conferring the highest value upon them; feelings became an obsession and were placed above everything else, and the expression of feelings was widely yet questionably regarded as a technique or craftsmanship. Of course, Hu’s implication sounds clearer here: the lyricist was unable to seize the historical opportunity for advances in science to inspire the lyric’s innovations. Thus, not only was the possibility of epics and dramatization in literary experiments rejected, but the application of techniques and the results of expression would be prone to a crisis. As with Ke Ke, Hu Mingshu also recognized the dynamic effects of scientific knowledge in spawning this form of poetry, but he was different from Ke Ke in a few ways: First, Hu no longer had confidence in the compromising effects of “the combination of feelings and intellect” and continued his efforts toward de-lyricization, rejecting the argument that “lyricality” is the decisive factor for writing poetry. Second, he placed greater emphasis on the incorporation of social contents and historical experience into poetry writing. Third, this resulted in stylistic differences between the two forms of poetry: the “intellectual poetry” of the 1930s is largely individualized metaphysical indulgence, whereas the “anti-lyricism” of the 1940s embarked on a serious consideration of the changes in the public world. Hu rightly pointed that out:

A few years ago, “Denial and Rejection of Emotions” offered by Ou Waiou and “The Exile of Lyricism” by Xu Chi were opposed by many people. But, as far as “anti-lyricism” is concerned, I totally agree with them. Lyric poetry cannot exist without elements of expression of feelings, but epics have reduced such elements, and there are even fewer such elements in satires and fabliaux. Then, is it possible to have a form of poetry completely devoid of expression of feelings? Maybe it is possible. There will be such poetry. We have already had it. Such poetry must be based on reason, intellect, imagination, feelings, history and geography, customs and habits, politics, society, science, and outlook on the world. In a word, expression of feelings will continue to exist, as man exists and expressing

³² HU, Mingshu胡明樹. Shi zhi chuanguo shang de zhu wenti 詩之創作上的諸問題 [Certain Issues Relating to Poetry Writing], p. 54.

*feelings is an innate ability. Nevertheless, poetry may still exist beyond the expression of feelings, as it is not always the decisive factor of poetry. Poems beyond the expression of feelings may look totally “non-feeling,” but in fact the feelings are solid iron which has cooled down after being fired at extremely high temperatures.*³³

Hu's move toward a new paradigm of “anti-lyricism” is articulated clearly here: “expression of feelings” is not always the decisive factor for poetry writing, and a poem may exist beyond the “expression of feelings”. The anti-lyricist poetry that Hu advocated was ironical, intellectual, and self-reflective and resorted to the writers' social consciousness; last but not least, it incorporated knowledge from various areas. Shortly after Hu's essay came out, a reader with the pseudonym “Ji Zong” 寄蹤 who disagreed with Hu wrote a letter to the editorial board. Not discouraged by the challenge, Hu went to great lengths to refute the interrogation “Ordinary people and even certain theorists yield to the tradition of *Jiushi* 舊詩 Old Poetry, they accept a notion that poetry is concerned with emotions alone, failing to recognize that there exists a kind of ‘new poetry’ which is overwhelmingly concerned with intellect and sensibility”; “it's important not to regard the function of poetry as simple conveyance of feelings; poetry also has the function of conveying intellect and presenting sensibility.”³⁴

The Rise of “Deep Lyrical” Discourse

The “deep lyrical” discourse is an alternative response to lyricism. It makes an effort to depart from the mode of expressing impromptu feelings and to integrate feelings, experiences, intellect, and “sensibility” (as claimed by T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Stephen Spender, etc.) into poetry, ultimately aiming to enhance the artistic quality of new poetry.

The renowned credos that *Shi shi jingyan* “poetry is the embodiment of experience” (詩是經驗) originated from German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 – 1926). According to Liang Zongdai's (梁宗岱, 1903 – 1983) allegation, *Xinyuepai shiren* 新月派詩人 the New Crescent poets were only well versed at displaying their techniques as they “do not have a passionate or enriched life as a backbone.” In view of this, Liang took pains to translate a paragraph in Rilke's *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* into Chinese, solemnly recommending it as a remedy for the flood of “lyricism”:

33 Ibid., pp. 54 – 55.

34 Ji, Zong 寄蹤, HU, Mingshu 胡明樹. Guanyu shi yu ganqing de taolun 關於詩與感情的討論 [Discussions on Poetry and Feelings], p. 42.

One's early poems may be so uninteresting. We should spend our lifetime anticipating and collecting, and if possible, seeking a long life. Then, in our late years, we might be able to write a decent 10-line poem, as poetry is not what is considered by people; it's not feelings (which, we had a long time ago), but experiences."³⁵

In order to enhance the aesthetic dimension of poetry, Rilke called upon poets to reject romanticism which placed feelings above everything else. The literary Romanticism the New Crescent poets inherited from British continued through the whole 19th century, until it was finally exposed to serious attacks by modernists like T. S. Eliot in the early 20th century. Liang developed an interest in Rilke, beginning to preach the novel notion that "poetry is experience."

It is Feng Zhi who received credit for offering an in-depth and comprehensive interpretation of the proposition "poetry is experience". In November 1936, Feng described his spiritual encounter with Rilke as follows: "Many people say that poetry requires feelings, but Rilke says that we already have feelings; what we need is experience, experience like that of those Buddhists who turn themselves into other creatures to taste their universal sorrows." As is well-known, Rilke's poetics was largely inspired by Rodin: he finally learned how to "watch," "listen to," "experience", and "share" the obscure soul of all things:

*He begins to look, watching the creatures in the world with pure love in mind. He watches rose petals, poppy flowers, leopards, rhinoceros, swans, flamingoes, and black cats. He gazes at prisoners, women either sick or mature, prostitutes, lunatics, paupers, elderly women, and blind people. He watches mirrors, beautiful laces, and women's fate and childhood. He attends upon them in humility, listens to their voice or silence, and shares their destiny which others ignore. All things around him look as if they have just been created by God. He completely removes his cultural clothes and watches with primitive eyes.*³⁶

The poet himself no longer takes expressing impromptu feelings for granted; instead, he/she focuses on the inner experience intensified. In the process of writing, the poet should inhibit the germination of passion and depict the subject peacefully to reveal the original appearance of things. In the transition of his poetics from youth to middle age, Rilke broke away from the persistent, unbridled emotional outpouring of the Romanticists in Germany in the late 19th

³⁵ LIANG, Zongdai梁宗岱. Lun shi 論詩 [On Poetry], pp. 107 – 108.

³⁶ FENG, Zhi馮至. Li-er-ke: Wei shi zhounian jiri zuo 里爾克——為十周年祭日作 [Rilke – In Memory of 10th Anniversary of His Passing], p. 295.

century, and dedicated himself entirely to the aesthetic pursuit of anti-lyricism: “He turned music into carving, liquid into crystal, and switched from the boundless ocean to the solemn mountains.”

Although, both Liang Zongdai and Feng Zhi recognized the core of Rilke’s poetic doctrines, their perceptions and elaborations were slightly different. Actually, the letter Liang wrote about Rilke was the result of his communication with Feng during his study-tour in Germany. It’s likely that from his conversation with Feng, Liang gained an understanding of Rilke’s poetic doctrine and then immediately proceeded to expound it. However, this expounding was made in the vein of symbolism, and displayed an ingrained predisposition to romanticism Feng Zhi tried to avoid. Therefore, Feng’s article was written intentionally not only for the established Romanticist but also for the rising Symbolists and Modernists who deliberately made their debuts in an enigmatic manner. Feng argued that neither understood the fundamental question: How did the poets make their transition from youthful lyric to mature ode? We need to look no further than the disguised aura of Liang’s inspiration theory in his Symbolism writings to understand how romantic he was deep down. But Feng apparently thought otherwise. He believed that the real solution was that poets should deepen their inward experience and develop a sense of shouldering life so that their writing could improve. Back then, however, few poets were aware of this issue; they were preoccupied with the renovation of rhetoric (in the case of Modernists 現代派) or were obsessed with intensified nationalist sentiments (in the case of the poets of the China Society of Poetry 中國詩歌會). This is the reason why Feng Zhi, who was a member of the editorial board of the *Xinshi* 新詩 *New Poetry* magazine, took pains to introduce Rilke instead of contributing any poetry of his own to it. Regrettably, few of his peers recognized his intention. At least for Feng, the “deep lyrical” discourse was an issue closely related to the quality of poetry, not merely about one’s technical level or social awareness.

Rilke’s poetics have never ceased to surprise generations of Chinese readers. Liu Muxia (柳木下, 1914 – 1998), a budding poet, translated *Visiting Rilke’s Tomb* 謁里爾克的墓 and three poems selected from Rilke’s *The Book of Hours*. In his lengthy essay entitled *Rilke as a Poet* (詩人里爾克), Liu stated that it was Rilke’s artistic idea which accepted solitude as the individual’s inescapable destiny and discovering serious or permanent meanings in nameless things as a serious job for poets. He also said that Rilke’s works didn’t seek to evoke the reader’s emotions but rather elevated the reader’s soul and helped reconstruct the order of inner life. Liu’s understanding of Rilke was on a par with Feng Zhi:

When memory and imagination are merged in our creative works, we can make experience a natural part of us due to its freshness. Through the creating and purifying functions of memory and experience, sorrow gains

new rays, and joy obtains fresh translucence. When experience turns into new rays in a clear and perpetual state, Rilke hailed “the invisible,” thinking that this is the mission of poetry. The “shock” that moved Rilke, as I mentioned earlier, is the “shock” that keeps us in this direction. In his later years, Rilke expanded this shock outwards while reviewing life and death as the two sides of “life,” thus entering a large and positive world. Hence, he eulogized existence. His eulogy was accompanied by deep signs, praising “life” from the bottom of his heart. This is the realm that Rilke reached in his final years. If we look back at the path from the destination, we may find that “The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge” experienced and referred to the misfortune and ailments of the 20th century. It means that the author’s “eulogized will” would inevitably run into a barrier as large as a mountain. Rilke overcame this barrier and managed to retain the “great rays from the inside”; he ascended to the summit of the language power and sang a noble eulogy like a new Orpheus. Therefore, in the literary world, he would definitely occupy a position as the youngest brother of Benítez and Hölderlin.³⁷

This is the argument for “experience” as the origin and subject matter of poetry and about the creative functions of “experience” in consolidating and transforming daily emotions. Here, it echoes the famous poetic description in *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* by Rilke.

In the 1940s, concern increased about the unbridled spread of “sentimentality” or “sentimentalism,” and the theoretical gist of “deep lyric” was revealed in the criticism of sentimentality. As Alex Preminger pointed out, the sentimentality in poetry included the following connotations: “(1) poetic indulgence in the exhibition of pathetic emotions for their own sake; (2) poetic indulgence of more emotions (often of a self-regarding kind) than seems warranted by the stimulus; (3) excessively direct poetic expression of pathos without a sufficient poetic correlative. Whether found in poet or reader, sentimentality (a form of emotional redundancy, and thus a fault of rhetoric as well as of ethics) often suggests the presence of self-pity and the absence of mature emotional self-control. The poetic sentimentalist appears to be interested in pathos as an end rather than as an artistic means or a constituent of a larger, less merely personal experience.”³⁸ M. H. Abrams moved this argument further, presenting an insightful analysis from a larger context: “since what constitutes emotional excess or overindulgence is relative both to the judgment of the individual and to larger-scale historical changes in culture and in literary fashion,

³⁷ LIU, Muxia 柳木下. Shiren Li-er-ke 詩人里爾克 [Rilke as a Poet]. In *Huaqiao ribao* 華僑日報 *Overseas Chinese Daily*, July 31, 1949.

³⁸ PREMINGER, A. (ed.) *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 763.

what to the common reader of one age is a normal expression of human feeling may seem sentimental to many later readers ... a useful distinction between sentimental and non-sentimental is one which does not depend on the intensity or type of the feeling expressed or evoked, but labels as sentimental a work or passage in which the feeling is rendered in commonplaces and clichés, instead of being freshly verbalized and sharply realized in the details of the representation.”³⁹ According to them, lyricism, if it’s extreme and low-class, would become “sentimentalism.” Moreover, the sentimentalism in modern Chinese poetics invited more thorough exploration. Proponents of “literature and art popularization” criticized Pure Poetry’s inclination towards sentimentality and classified it as a reflection of petty bourgeois sentiments; they attributed such sentiments to the petty bourgeois’s detachment from the masses in the living world, arguing that the most important way to eliminate sentimentality was to reform the writers’ outlook on life and grasp the positive elements of the subject matter or contents. In revolutionary theorists’ eyes, atom-like individuals could not exert their creative potential unless they were organized into a group. The duty of literature was political indoctrination and culture building; they regarded the elimination of the sentimentality of individualism as the sign of identity change. However, both groups failed to shake the foundation of sentimentalism, as they shared the poetic notions and value judgment of lyricism. Honestly speaking, it is Yuan Kejia 袁可嘉 (1921 – 2009) who not only debunked the theoretical roots of sentimentalism in poetry but also put forward an alternative remedy for it.

Yuan Kejia’s monograph about “New Poetry Modernization” focused on the central task of “deep lyric” in terms of theoretical principles and technical application. His notion of “integration of reality, symbol and metaphysics” was an embodiment in this regard: “Reality represents a close grasp of the current world and life; symbol suggests the implicitness and subtlety, while metaphysics represents a vigorous combination of sensibility, pensiveness, feelings and will, and the revelation of wit from time to time.”⁴⁰ As Yuan saw it, Western modern poetry witnessed a transformation from “the movement of feeling” to “the movement of dramatics” through the 19th to 20th century, this doesn’t mean that modern poetry needs no expression of feelings, but that under the influence of cultural evolution, the original straightforward outpouring of feelings had been replaced by roundabout dramatizing. He also pointed out that Western modern poetry doesn’t stress the enhancement of subjective emotions

³⁹ ABRAMS, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 284.

⁴⁰ YUAN, Kejia 袁可嘉. *Xinshi xiandaihua: xin chuantong de xunqiu* 新詩現代化：新傳統的尋求 [Modernization of New Poetry – Seeking A New Tradition]. Tianjin: *Dagong bao* 大公報 *Ta Kung Pao*, March 30, 1947.

but organizes the expression of complex experiences.⁴¹ Yuan's elaboration of "deep lyric" was reflected in his dialectical understanding of feelings and experience – poetry is the language of feelings but it is not confined to feelings; poetry comes from evocation of passion, but evocation alone does not make a poem. With this theoretical premise, he was disappointed to find that the prevailing belief in the current Chinese poetic arena was "the obsession with passion" and that the notion was widespread that poetry was the product of enthusiasm and that enthusiasm alone was sufficient to produce good poems, regardless of the nature and degree of enthusiasm and how it was expressed.⁴² Yuan strongly criticized this inclination towards lyricism, which stressed feelings but neglected experience; he said: "The belief that poetry is nothing but a manifestation of passion must be smashed. No theory does more harm to poetry than unbridled feelings; whether your aim is the description of will or the representation of enthusiasm, and whether you're dealing with an individual or a group, you have to include elements of the mind and refine your experience from the depth and nature of matters"⁴³ Furthermore, Yuan contrasted emotional sentimentality with notional sentimentality, i.e., "political sentimentality" (政治感傷性) in modern poetry. According to him, "political sentimentality" didn't mean that the notions themselves contained sentimental elements (they were generally solemn and grand), but that the way the notions were expressed and embraced was seriously sentimental, i.e., the uncritical acceptance of political notions, horrendous lack of personality, weak imagination, acceptance of rugged poetics as the only form of life vitality, the practice of regarding shoddy techniques as vigorous, and toppling the awareness of artistic value.⁴⁴ According to Yuan, both emotional sentimentality and notional sentimentality were flawed by their failure to distinguish between life experience and art experience:

Most of the poems we read roughly fall into two categories: one that expresses the author's strong wishes or convictions in an attempt to influence others' wishes or beliefs, and the other that conveys the author's feverish feelings in order to influence others. Authors who write poems to convey their wishes mostly have firm convictions and tend to use

⁴¹ YUAN, Kejia 袁可嘉. Shi yu minzhu 詩與民主 [Poetry and Democracy]. Tianjin: *Dagong bao* 大公報 *Ta Kung Pao*, October 30, 1948.

⁴² YUAN, Kejia 袁可嘉. Duiyu shi de mixin 對於詩的迷信 [On the Cult of Poetry], pp. 7 – 13.

⁴³ YUAN, Kejia 袁可嘉. Shi de xijuhua 詩的戲劇化 [Dramatization of Poetry]. Tianjin: *Dagong bao* 大公報 *Ta Kung Pao*. April 25, 1948.

⁴⁴ YUAN, Kejia 袁可嘉. Lun xiandai shi zhong de zhengzhi ganshangxing 論現代詩中的政治感傷性 [On Political Sentimentality in Modern Poetry]. Tianjin: *Yishi Bao* 益世報 *Yishi Daily*, October 27, 1946.

*straightforward and strong language by shouting “I want to” or “We don’t want ...”, or “We support” or “We oppose” Most authors who express their passion have clear objects of affection or resentment and make undisguised statements. Conveyance of wishes and expression of feelings are both significant matters in our life, and therefore are significant for poetry as well and thus are necessary and worth eulogizing. The flaw shared by these two categories of poems – or the primary cause of their failure – does not lie with the point of departure, which is not problematic, or with the destination, as poetry would eventually give us a definitive impression, which can be strong and, in some cases, too clear, so that the wishes or feelings become part of the experience of the poem.*⁴⁵

To salvage lyricism, Yuan believed that “application of objective correlatives,” “special structure of image metaphors,” “arrangement of imaginative logic for the entire structure of poem,” and “pursuit of linguistic flexibility” would produce indirect and implicit effects, fully conveying the poet’s “curve of feelings” rather than straightforward “linear motion.”⁴⁶ He argued that the overall conception of the “new poetry dramatization” was for the deep lyric: “Direct representation should be avoided as much as possible and the author’s wishes and feelings should be conveyed with appropriate outside objects”; specific methods for doing so include Rilke’s way of turning to the heart and seeing oneself in other objects, Auden’s psychological exploration and social analysis, and “poetic drama” writing.⁴⁷

Conclusion

In essence, the conflict among lyricism, anti-lyricism and deep lyric is not a clash between “right” and “wrong,” but between “right” and “right.” This is because lyricism regards feelings as a key component of poems, which cannot be absolutely classified as right or wrong. This poetics credo has spawned numerous lyric classics, a fact that we cannot deny. Lyricism should be forsaken in entirety only when it has inclined towards sentimentalism, lost the awareness of harmony between form and substance, and neglected the importance of experience, imagination, and technique. Meanwhile issues associated with anti-lyricism and deep lyric should be examined as well. For popular lyricists, poetry is not an isolated, closed and self-sufficient linguistic entity, neither is it

⁴⁵ YUAN, Kejia 袁可嘉. Shi de xijuhua 詩的戲劇化 [Dramatization of Poetry]. Tianjin: *Dagong bao* 大公報 *Ta Kung Pao*, April 25, 1948.

⁴⁶ YUAN, Kejia 袁可嘉. Xinshi xiandaihua de zai fenxi 新詩現代化的再分析 [Re-analysis of New Poetry Modernization]. Tianjin: *Dagong bao* 大公報 *Ta Kung Pao*, May 18, 1947.

⁴⁷ YUAN, Kejia 袁可嘉. Shi de xijuhua 詩的戲劇化 [Dramatization of New Poetry].

an “order of fantasy” where personal emotions are set free; rather, it is a socially symbolic behavior of the subject and calls for close dialogue between aesthetics and politics, the individual and the masses, poetry writing and the living world. Yuan Kejia diagnosed political sentimentality in terms of the principles of modernism, but he failed to investigate the problems critically in the grand historical context; he merely scratched the surface of the aesthetic flaws of lyricism without performing a specific historical analysis of the reason why lyricism became a hegemonic structure. Nevertheless, the emergence of lyricism, anti-lyricism and deep lyric as three dimensions of poetry is logical, though they have not replaced one another in accordance with a linear teleology. We may say that they all have their own distinctive theoretical basis and trajectory of development, and that their competition, entanglement and interaction with each other have provided the drive for the evolution of lyrical poetics in modern China.

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