

MU DAN'S POEM *REVELATION*, THE BIBLE AND WESTERN MODERNISM

Liu YAN

Institute for Transcultural Studies, Beijing International Studies University,
No. 1 Dingfuzhuang Nanli, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100024, China
liuyan_1967@yahoo.com.cn

The purpose of this paper is to unscramble the Christian elements in *Revelation* by Mu Dan, a modern Chinese poet.¹ Mu Dan borrowed them from the *Holy Bible* and Western modernist literature, which made his poetry unique. The books of *Psalms*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Job* from the *Holy Bible* motivated him to use prayer as a literature form in *Revelation*. Mu Dan's religious poems have enriched our thinking about human civilization and the meaning of life. They also provide a special perspective to understand the modern Chinese intellectual's interested in Christian belief and the difficulties they have encountered.

Key words: Revelation, Christian discourse, pilgrimage, Christian belief, modernity

In the 20th century, Christianity entered into the views of Chinese writers pondering over human nature, civilization, war, social problems, life dilemmas and the like. Among the writers influenced by Christianity, such as Zhou Zuoren 周作人(1885-1967), Xu Zhimo 徐志摩(1897-1931), Guo Moruo 郭沫若(1892-1978), Wang Duqing 王独清(1898-1940), Bingxin 冰心(1900-1999),

¹ The first Chinese version of this paper "If We Could Only See Him: Christian Discourse in Mudan's *Revelation*" [如果我们能够看见他——论穆旦《隐现》中的基督教话语] was published in *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture: Aesthetic Theology* [基督教文化学刊: 审美的神学], Autumn 2008, No. 20, pp. 254-285. The present English version is revised with some rewritten parts. I want to thank my U.S. friend Kathy Liebersbach, who helped me to correct the English grammar in this paper. Without her patience, kindness and support, it would have been impossible for me to write the English translation.

Chen Mengjia 陈梦家(1911–66), Lin Yutang 林语堂 (1895–1976), Gu Cheng 顾城(1956–93) and Haizi 海子 (1964–1989), Mu Dan 穆旦 (original name Zha Liangzheng 查良铮, 1918–1977) was the most prominent. According to Marián Gálik, Mu Dan was “the deepest philosophical poet among the Chinese in relation to the biblical legacy”.² His poetry is permeated with a strong Christian sentiment and lively modern theological thoughts. Many of his writings are filled with Christian terms including ‘sin’, ‘fall’, ‘delivery’, ‘condone’, ‘turn and repent’, ‘confession’, ‘conversion’, ‘salvation’ and ‘eternity’. They also successfully applied the narrative patterns, religious structures and symbolic images from the *Holy Bible*. Therefore, we can say that Mu Dan’s poetry to some degree presents or embodies the spirit of Christianity or at least identifies with “the spirit of Christianity” (jidujiao jingshen, 基督教精神).

That is to say, we can hardly appreciate the non-Chineseness, uniqueness and Chinese modernity of Mu Dan’s works without the perspective of Christian belief. This essay analyses “*Revelation*” (隐现, *Yin Xian*, 1947) with the goals of demonstrating the source and Chinese expression of Christian discourse in Mu Dan’s poetry, observing the characteristics that Christian faith bears in Modern Chinese poetry and enquiring into the difficulties and possibilities for Chinese modern intellectuals to convert to Christianity.

I. Negative Faith: Sin and Redemption in *Revelation*

Many of Mu Dan’s poems were composed in the early stage of his writing such as *She de youhuo* (蛇的诱惑, *The Temptation of a Serpent*, 1940), *Wo xiang ziji shuo* (我向自己说, *I Say to Myself*, 1941), *Shen mo zhi Zheng* (神魔之争, *The Struggle between God and the Devil*, 1941), *Shi ba shou* (诗八首, *Eight Poems*, 1942), *Qi Shen er zhang* (祈神二章, *The Two Prayers*, 1943), *Shi* (诗, *Poems*, 1943), and *Yi* (忆, *Memory*, 1945), which are permeated with intense sentiments of religion and modernity. *Revelation*, which was written in August 1947, is the most typical. With clear and piercing themes, systematic structure and explicit images, this religious poem digs into the purgatory of modernity: fragmented personality, a distorted and struggling modern people, lost civilization and invulnerable egoism. It subtly conveys a yearning for God by the modern Chinese as well as opening the possibility for them to believe in God. The allusion at its very beginning, “*O let us open eyes, my Saviour*”³, touches

² GÁLIK, Marián *The Bible as a Source of Modern Chinese Poetry: From Zhou Zuoren to Haizi* “[圣经]对中国现代诗歌的影响：从周作人到海子”, p. 121.

³ *Hechang* 和唱 *Chorus* in Chapter Two of *Revelation* was written in March 1943. The English and Chinese versions of the poem were collected in *Mu Dan wenji* (*Collected Works of Mu Dan*), Vol. 1, pp. 243–64. All of Mu Dan’s English poems in this paper were

upon the theme of the whole poem.

This writing technique is an apostrophe. American scholar Leland Ryken defines apostrophe as “a direct address or calling to someone or something absent, as if the addressed were present, listening and ready to reply”.⁴ Similar to the yearnings for God in the book of *Psalms* in the *Holy Bible*, the yearnings to the Saviour here indicate the poem is to narrate the searching, repentance, correction and conversion undertaken by secular people to expose and heckle human sin. This is a long and difficult voyage of seeking faith.

As is well known, the 1940s was a time of suffering in which China saw an eight-year war with Japan, a three-year civil war, as well as serious inflation and devastating poverty. That decade was also a difficult, painful and aching time in the rest of the world. The catastrophe of World War II disillusioned almost all of the previous ideas on human civilization, bringing the viability of justice, freedom, democracy, science, love and truth into question. Idealism collapsed under the heavier and heavier weight of the circumstances of the war. Booming modern capitalism not only gratified mankind with conveniences and flashy metropolises, advanced technology and mechanization, but also gave rise to a money-oriented lifestyle. Consequently, human beings came to suffer from incredible alienation, isolation and helplessness which continued to cause overwhelming nihilism and egoism.

The German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900) proclaimed “God is dead”, unlocking a new age of nihilism which disentangled all the restrictions on morality. On the one hand, this was a time of disorientation when many were immersed in loneliness and split personalities – like children struggling to be born. On the other hand, this was an age of redemption because negation and suspicion of God indicated a search for new solutions. Just as Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) said: “Our age sees an exodus of previous gods, while the descent of new gods has not come true. Here comes a reduplicate dilemma, where mankind is circumfused with pains and bitterness and cannot help imploring.”⁵

Living in the midst of such chaos and bloodshed, sensitive and anguished poets such as Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), a “prophet” and “sage”, not only closely watched the ignorant and muddle-headed people struggling with their lust, but also closely examined the whole of civilization passed down through the generations. Although enduring the gap in time and confronted with the misery produced by moral degeneration, writers and philosophers like Friedrich

translated by himself.

⁴ RYKEN, Leland *Renshi Shengjing wenxue* [认识<圣经>文学], p. 109.

⁵ Quoted according to LIU, Xiaofeng 刘晓枫, *Zhenjiu yu xiaoyao* [拯救与逍遥] *Delivering and Dallying*, p. 251.

Hölderlin (1770–1818) and Martin Heidegger were still expecting, praying and appealing to God for delivery and salvation.

Numerous confusions harried both Western modern poets like William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), Ezra Pound (1885–1972), T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) and Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973) as well as the Chinese modern poets from the “Nine Leaves School” (九叶派, Jiu ye pai) such as 杜运燮 Du Yunxie (1915–2002), 陈敬蓉 Chen Jingrong (1917–1989), 郑敏 Zheng Min (1920–), 唐祈 Tang Qi (1920–1990), 唐湜 Tang Shi (1920–2005), 辛笛 Xin Di (1912–2004), 杭约赫 Hang Yuehe (1917–1995), 袁可嘉 Yuan Kejia (1921–2008) and Mu Dan. They were pondering where all the disasters, crimes and temptations came from: Why is the world inundated with murder, violence, chicanery and conspiracy? What is the meaning of justice, sincerity, benevolence, love and freedom? Do human beings live a conceited, helpless and absurd existence? How can we extricate humanity from this plight?

Just like T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* (1922) and *Four Quartets* (1945), Mu Dan’s *Revelation* is a poetic rendering of undergoing loss and redemption, guiding people out of dumbness into conversion. It begins with a description of the predicament and the confusion of mankind existent from the beginning of time:

*Now, day after day and night after night,
We come from a section of road completely lost,
Once flashing starlight or sunlight, then out of touch with us,
Unnamable, and we say we come from a section of Time,
A series of complicated, dry broken images,
To make us weep, to make us laugh, to make us worry
With the same complicated and broken strife in our blood and mire;
This moment’s pursuit or that moment’s satisfaction--
But all the temptations tempt us only to keep further away.*

In the above Mu Dan writes: “But all the temptations tempt us only to keep further away.” From whom are we kept away? We are kept away from God. Our ancestors acquired sin when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruits on the tree of knowledge of good and evil and were sent out from the Garden of Eden by God. From then on, humans have stepped into a grand maze – we do not know where we came from or where we should go. All the paths taken are but “a series of complicated, dry broken images”, “broken strife in our blood and mire”. Unremitting efforts have been made to build strongholds of civilization screening pain and confusion, while:

*In vain: for we stand on a desolate earth,
We are inhabitants of the twentieth century agitating in its darkness,
We have machines and institutions but no civilization,
We have complex emotions but no outlet,
We have many sounds but no truth,
We come from the same conscience but are concealed from each other:*

So long has been humanity's predicament. Mankind has fundamentally walked away from God. Compared with people living in previous ages depending on a value system sustained by Christianity or traditional doctrines, we, the people of the 20th and 21st centuries are simply rootless and helpless, just like boughs detached from the tree or fish out of water. Thus, we experience sin, isolation and hopelessness. "We are inhabitants of the twentieth century agitating in its darkness." Yet, inspiringly, Mu Dan revealed an insight that widespread corruption and degeneration could bring about an appeal to God for new beliefs as well as the possibility of redemption.

What can we do? Mu Dan thought that humans must recognize clearly that sin resulting from disobedience, fears, selfishness, cowardice and conceit is deeply embedded in us:

*If we could give our love
Shining, not upon things to wear it out
If we could wash clear
Our small fears, our hesitations and shadows
Against the broad light,*

*If we could set ourselves free
From the dark house of Desire and the nutshell of Habit
To receive him,
If we could only taste
Not the sugarcoat of Experience with a bilious core.*

It is possible for corrupted people to be delivered, provided that they are willing to repent and they are willing to return to God's embrace in great humbleness. The difficulty is that it is only in despair that most people sense the existence of God and realize the insignificance of mankind:

*Though still, he gives the birth to confusion,
He is the origin of forces lying on its opposite.
O the deviations and entanglements he has laid
So as to make us tired and nostalgic*

*For the place of One.
He loves us so much
He departs from us,
He gives us a little power and waits till it turns to ashes.
O he is waiting for us to return
With all our spent heat, to his benign bosom.*

The subject here equals the message of one section in the *Holy Bible*, *Job* 12: 13–25: “With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding. If he tears down, none can rebuild; if he shuts a man in, none can open. If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land. With him are strength and sound wisdom; the deceived and the deceiver are his.”⁶ Human beings are not able to obey God’s will unless they, like Job, consistently remain in unquestioning obedience to God despite all the hardships and tribulations. For God is ultimately benevolent, allowing difficulties with the intention of directing people onto the right path, waiting for them to return to Him.

Since the dawn of the 20th century, Darwinism has been emerging, booming and penetrating into every walk of life. Scientific Rationality, a sequel to Darwinism, has also been spreading. In the first half of the last century, the leading voices said “God is dead”, expressing the ethos of ‘counter-Logos, counter-God’. As Swiss Prof. Heinrich Ott then observed, “Now those who are talking about Creation, thinking about God, need to understand that anything about Ultimate Reality has been under question.”⁷ This indicates that people were growing doubtful about whether or not God exists, and the belief in the divinity of God was retreating into obscurity. Paradoxically, “the retreat or absence of God” came to highlight the absurdity of modern people’s stagnant struggle, being fretted and anguished in driftlessness, while the desire for roots, conviction, faith and godliness is ubiquitous and apparent.

Actually, modernity has enjoyed an affinity with the Christian faith since the Renaissance, which was embodied as a process of secularization of the dominant discourse in Medieval theology. Therefore, modern writers in the West have been producing works that shared robust roots in Christianity. Some of them displayed the alienated and preposterous status of vacuous modern man in a way of absolute negation or repudiation – *The Castle* (1922) by Franz Kafka (1883–1924), *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) by Earnest Hemingway (1899–1961) and *Waiting for Godot* (1948) by Samuel Beckett (1906–1989). Some others, in a manner of affirmation and conversion, sustained the tribulation and made an earnest effort

⁶ *Holy Bible*, pp. 802–803.

⁷ OTT, Heinrich *Shangdi* [上帝] *God*, p. 9.

to ward off evil as well as to appeal for benevolence – *The Waste Land* (1922) and *Four Quartets* (1935–1943) by T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), *Duino Elegies* (1931) by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), *The Sound and the Fury* (1928) by William Faulkner (1897–1962) and *My Ántonia* (1918) by Willa Sibert Cather (1843–1947). These writings offered diverse solutions to the modern spiritual vacuum and the demise of morality.

It is easy to observe a recurring theme in Mu Dan's poetry resembling that of Western modern literature. Influenced by R.M. Rilke, T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden, Mu Dan maintained that we should abandon the arbitrary ego and be converted into an impersonal self. As long as "We turn round, and see you", and superimpose ourselves with God, our lives will be renewed.

As an eminent poet of Chinese modernist literature, Mu Dan was seeking a solution to the problems of anxiety, inquietude and entanglement brought on by the collision of traditional and modern civilizations. He was struggling and conflicted. Pain and anxiety among the modern Chinese of the 20th century filled Mu Dan's poems with the depiction of bitter struggle and ardent appeal. On one side, the poet mocked the established civilization, questioned the existing conventions and parsed the fragmented and disillusioned self. On the other he longed and called for ultimate belief, desiring to find the path to conversion. In his religious poem, *Revelation*, the interaction and conflict between sets of contradictory discourses are distinct – the individual self vs. impersonal self, pride vs. humility, wrath vs. repentance, deprecation vs. mercy, Satan vs. angels and negation vs. affirmation. These conflicts visualize the two competing perspectives of Mu Dan toward Christianity: God is concealed (隱 Yin) as well as revealed (現 Xian).

We may say the retreat or absence of God compels people to seek new beliefs. Inescapably there are overwhelming doubts, apprehensions, perplexities, hatred and cursing which could potentially entangle people in graver crises without restoring their shattered personalities. Such was the typical scene of modern Chinese people seeking belief in new circumstances, expounded with complex and obscure Christian discourse in Mu Dan's poems.

II. Holy Trinity and the Religious Structure of *Revelation*

Revelation has adopted a calling/praying style – the usual style of the Bible's *Psalms*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Job* – assuming a strong pious manner and typical religious structure. "The lyric poems in *the Bible* are often comprised of three parts – the statement of the subject, the development of the subject and the conclusion."⁸ *Revelation* follows the same pattern. Chapter One, *The Pilgrimage*,

⁸ RYKEN, Leland op. cit., p. 127.

briefly depicts the digression of human history, the long hardship and quandary suffered by the multitudes; Chapter Two, *The Supplication*, sympathetically describes the relentless trudge of human beings towards the truth and their unrelenting struggle for relief from despair, indicating the possibilities for repentance and conversion; Chapter Three, *The Fountainhead*, is essentially a whole-hearted calling for conversion to God. A detailed analysis is as follows:

1. Chapter One *The Pilgrimage*: Statement of the Subject

The statement of the subject is a recalling of some thinking, emotions and situations. In Chapter One of *The Pilgrimage*, the utterance of “we” – referring to the poet, his audience and the entire human race – reveals the difficult situation of human beings. This chapter is a parallel to *Ecclesiastes* 1:2: “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” and *Ecclesiastes* 3:1, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”⁹ Like the most intelligent King Solomon, Mu Dan informs us as a prophet:

*All that lives in the air, on the ground or under water we have seen,
We see that in all the changes this changes not,
No matter you succeed or fail, this changes not,
Strange things have happened, are happening or will happen, but this changes
not;
Innumerable rivers flow into the sea, but the sea is never filled, it turns the water
back to the river again;
A generation of mankind is past, another generation comes,
it is upon the ruins of the old comes back the new;
Under the sun we build houses, roadways, and bridges, but all our labor is only a
repetition of our ancestors.
Or we carve images on granite stone to adore heroes and heroines, only to find
them finally blurred and indistinct,
We lament over the disappearance of the beautiful, though disappears never its
flame.
What all our discoveries of Science are turned on – but comfort we have not made
a bit more, nor grief less.
We live together with errors, but we are tired, and yearning for back to Nature;
Solomon, the King of Israel, once said:
Everything is vain everything makes us weary.*

The poet recited Solomon’s sentence in *Revelation* to tell us that humans are finite and variable while God is infinite and invariable. Here, weariness and

⁹ *Holy Bible*, op. cit., p. 1059.

vanity are a kind of rewording of the contents and images in *Ecclesiastes* 1:3-9:¹⁰

*What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?
A generation goes, and a generation comes: but the earth remains forever.
The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises.
The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north;
round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.
All the streams run to the sea; but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.
All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.
What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and
there is nothing new under the sun.
Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"?
It has been already in the ages before us.*

Mu Dan wants us to understand our situation, acknowledge the existence of the invariable Master and realize our ignorance and rebellion so that we can receive the grace freely given by the Creator:

*And so we say,
What could we give? What could we receive?
In an ever indifferent flow, all pass in and out of us, birth and death, tears and
blood, truth and lying.
There is one Being which so tempts and deserts us,
If we raise a hand to wave; which remains still,
If by thus we have changed the pattern of light and shade, made flowers to open,
or caused a confusion forming in another body of constellation,
O, Lord, it is only your intention forming in its own direction.*

In a poetic way, *Revelation* is a response to *Ecclesiastes*: we are in "an ever indifferent flow", we let life eclipse faith. "Birth and death, tears and blood, truth and lying" are unrelated to the intentions of people. If by any chance mankind has scored some achievements, inevitably they are merely footprints on the path destined by God. It is a total negation of human wisdom and a sincere acknowledgement of the vanity of human endeavours that will bring people to God. It is conversion rather than human effort – including science, modern inventions and rationality – that would redeem the degenerate; it is God that predisposes, sustains and determines, although we as conceited beings are too

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, op. cit., pp. 802–803.

ignorant and obstinate to admit it.

The modern Russian theologian Lev Shestov (1866–1938) claimed that knowledge led people to chains rather than to freedom, and that rational truth provided by knowledge has been vulnerably overpowered by the growing ongoing sufferings of mankind. Thus, faith in God alone can remove sin from man and help mankind to rise again. But faith is something not based on what people see, hear and learn. Rather, it is beyond intellectual speculation and generated from ‘the calling of the wild’. According to Lev Shestov, “the principles, the origins and fundamental ways of human life are expressed in the tears wept when we open our minds and cry out to God for answers, instead of relying on our intellect”.¹¹ Coinciding with Solomon and Lev Shestov’s view, Mu Dan’s vision repudiates imposing theories promoted by persons such as Charles Robert Darwin (1809–1882), Karl Marx (1818–1883), F. W. Nietzsche (1844–1900), Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and Michel Foucault (1926–1984), and shows limits to human wisdom, pointing to the road of conversion as the way of finding the real meaning of life. As Jesus Christ said in *John* 14:6, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. no one comes to the Father except through me.*”¹²

2. Chapter Two *The Supplication*: The development of the subject¹³

Lyric poems in the *Holy Bible* tend to use the techniques of correlation and parallelism to express their themes. In parallelism, equivalent and contradictory corresponding words and expressions and identical or similar grammatical styles are usually employed in two or more verses to convey diverse meanings of the same phrase. As Irene Eber points out, “parallelism is, however, not always repetition. It can be an intensification of the preceding line or part, a concretization, or a contrast, all extensively used in Chinese poetry as well.”¹⁴ Mu Dan also uses these techniques in his *Revelation*:

¹¹ SHESTOV, Lev *Shesituofu wenji* [舍斯托夫文集] *The Collected Works of Lev Shestov*, p. 491.

¹² *Holy Bible*, op. cit., p. 187.

¹³ Chapter Two, *The Supplication*, in the English version has two sections: A & B. In the Chinese version there are four sections. There are two voices asking and answering between the lovers – the individual and the chorus – the collective. It resembles the actors on a drama stage. The dramatic ask-and-answer style has well illustrated the theme of this chapter: each person’s pilgrimage progress is a formidable trek accompanied mostly by painful discovery. The chorus here reminds readers of the chorus in Ancient Greek tragedies.

¹⁴ EBER, Irene “The Fountain of Living Waters. Introduction,” In GÁLIK, Marián, *Influence, Translation and Parallels, Selected Studies on the Bible in China*, p. 21.

*And in the direction which we can never direct, there you
Give us a time for mountains, and a time for plains,
A time for meeting, and a time for farewell,
A time for deceiving and a time for being deceived,
A time for rains, and a time for winds,
A time for embrace, and a time for boredom,
A time for beginning, and a time for end,
A time for faith, and a time for despair;*

Seven sets of antonyms modifying the omnipotent God are adopted here: "mountains" and "plains", "meeting" and "farewell", "deceiving" and "being deceived", "rains" and "winds", "embrace" and "boredom", "beginning" and "ending", "faith" and "despair". They bring forth, bit by bit, the disillusion and agony of people aching in the abyss of despair.

Parallelism and repetition are both ways to deepen the theme and tools to add to the beauty of rhyme and rhythm. In *The Supplication*, repetition of the similar verses, "If we could see him / If we could only see", emerge regularly, echoing with each other. From time to time they give reply in a resonant and imposing voice. This repetitive sentence is like the theme in a musical movement, progressively highlighting the solution to a "spiritual vacuum" and "moral demise" – relying on and believing in God.

3. Chapter Three *The Fountainhead*: Conclusion

In most cases, the concluding part of a religious lyric is an abstraction of the previous thinking, feelings and positions with a prayer at its end. Here *Revelation*, in its winding-up stage, describes the realization and repentance of human beings and finally reveals the boundless love God shows to his people.

*While unable to make a description of you, let us be calm and patient,
Let your unutterable name touch upon our thirsty lips, restless hands and
unsteady steps,
For we have already forgotten
Only when we meet with failure one after the other could we conceive of your
magnanimity and perfection,
Only when we have taken numerous rounds could we have joined you in every
direction.*

*Let us be like Jesus, give us what exaltation you give him,
For we have already forgotten
To enlarge our self in the field of non-self.*

*Let us take an ascending flight toward you, in the unbroken succession of things,
Let us contradict ourselves to embrace an everwidening region.*

The Lord is indescribable and unnamable. Approaching Him means abnegating ourselves. Yet He desires to reconcile humanity to Himself. God's will is that we humans accept His love for us, which He demonstrated by sacrificing His only son, Jesus Christ, while we were still separated from Him so that we may return to Him. When we abnegate ourselves to Him, His love frees us from the fears of this life, allows us to live in the peace and joy that come from being in His will and assures us of being together with the Creator at the terminus of a tortuous path. With this aim, Revelation, in its finale, intensifies the theme of conversion affirmatively:

*All these have pushed us to an opposite end, it is time
We turn round, and see you.*

*It is time now. And this is our twisted being
For you to straighten. This is our split heart
For you to knead into a whole,
O Lord, the fountainhead of being, let us hear the gushing sound of you flow.*

Nothing but the "water of life" freely given by God can irrigate the withered hearts in the wasteland. Being a repentant sinner, the poet was able to expose our faults and sins and urge us to turn around and be converted. Like Job, Mu Dan persisted in searching for obedience to God in spite of numerous mental pains, resentments and doubts. This poet of modern China was convinced that the salvation of human beings definitely comes through transcending the alienated status of the individual as well as pursuing reunion with his isolated object – God. A series of religious expressions, including "fusion" (糅合 rouhe), "coincidence" (合一 heyi), "combination" (结合 jiche), "merging" (融和 ronghe) and "integration" (整合 zhenghe) recurred in Mu Dan's poetry, representing an ultimate home and shelter for the soul of modern people.

The apostle John said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."¹⁵ If we do not believe in the Son of God then we cannot be saved. The ultimate cause behind all suffering is unbelief in God. The mass of people have rejected God and become self-centred,

¹⁵ *Holy Bible*, op. cit., p. 157.

self-righteous, stubborn, unhappy and unruly beings. Complete reliance, submission and conversion to God will unite people with the fountainhead of life and the anchor point of living. At the end of *Revelation* Mu Dan prays to the Lord that we will hear God's pressing voice urging us in an enlightened hush and that we will see His revelation of light in the darkness. The lyrics whisper to us "It is the time" for us "to turn round" to see the Lord, and to "hear the gushing sound of you flow".

III. Fragmentation and Restoration of the Self: God in *Revelation*

It is always hard for human beings to acquire a true and complete faith because a widespread negation of the existence of God has been well promulgated. On the one hand, God seems to have retreated, concealed Himself, faded away, been banished or even been eliminated. On the other hand, the Most High is longed for and courted to an unprecedented extent. Modern vacuous men trudge on their life journey in profound anxiety and distress, yearning for God. Twentieth century literature more potently displays the embarrassingly broken relations between human beings and God than at any other historical stage. Modelled on the early writings of T.S. Eliot, including *the Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925), Mu Dan's *Revelation* emphasizes mankind's broken relationship with God, answering such questions as: 'How is it possible for people to see Him with their eyes?' and 'If we cannot see Him, by what means can we believe in and rely on Him?'

Mu Dan's theological perception in *Revelation* is profound, intricate and paradoxical. In his point of view, no definition can elucidate the nature of God. Mu Dan considered the manifold identifications of Him in varied circumstances. To name this supreme power, Mu Dan utilizes "God" (上帝, shang di), "Lord" (主或神, zhu, shen), "Being" (存在, cunzai), "Everlasting Light" (永在的光, yong zai de guang) and "the Son of Man" (人子, renzi). He wants to present God, the Creator, as not only the dominator of people's destiny, but also as the comforter of people in their digression and divided inner world, the guide for the forked road, the pacificator of the anguished heart, and finally, the Saviour of the sinner. In Mu Dan's eye, God is the fountainhead and shelter of the misfortunate and the happy. Although human beings cannot see the whole of Him, still, they can sense and speculate on the essence of the Lord and consequently wait for the final delivery. For example:

*In the process of Nature's metamorphosis,
I happen to love a temporary piece of you.
Though I weep, burn out, burn out and live again,
Dear, it is only God playing with himself.*

— *Eight Poems* 《诗八首》 (1942)

*O Lord, who traps us thus in the hold of Present.
Along dog-teeth tunnel we march, groping
To and fro. Let us takes as one truth
Your contradictions. O let us be patient,
You who endow us with fulfilment, and its agonies.*
— *Into Battle* 《出发》 (1942)

*O Everlasting Light! In vain we enlarge
Our self, and look at our experiences.
A dreadful nightmare is swallowing us down,
While everything delusive, even our tears*

*Create nothing but tears. Automatically
We are moved along, and our clean up
Adds to confusion. O love that's conceived in our heart!
Though never born but in a litter of Mistakes.*
— *Poems* 《诗》 (1943)

Mu Dan postulates that the splitting, fragmentation and negation of the self actually belong to a transcending process of approaching the greater-self, unity and completeness in God. This paradoxical way of acquiring belief, as related above, offers a perspective for the comprehension of the nexus between the split personality, blazing modernity and the Christian discourse in Mu Dan's poems.

Mu Dan, like Western modern poets such as Charles Baudelaire (1821–1861), R.M. Rilke, Franz Kafka (1883–1924), William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), James Joyce (1882–1941), T.S. Eliot and Albert Camus (1913–1960) focuses on depicting the fragmented, preposterous and paralytic modernity in an ironical and negative way, which virtually pictures the struggling and howling of a tortured and desperate modern mind. This epitomizes a profound transfer, marking the closure of the enlightenment dreamscape and the damnation of humanism and idealism that was prevalent since the Renaissance.

According to Stanley R. Hopper's idea, poetry is not the Saviour, but it can expose human inadequacy in a world plagued with evil and misery and thus direct mankind toward God and his salvation.¹⁶ By unfolding a vivid frame of the absurd status of human beings after their departure from God, the religious poems of Mu Dan reveal that the modern mind has come all the way from contradiction, separation, fluctuation, indetermination and various endeavours towards a spontaneous longing for a solution. This can be a permanent cure for its soul,

¹⁶ HOPPER, Stanley Romaine *Xinyan de weiji* [信仰的危机] *The Crisis of Faith*, p. 145.

offering real freedom and integration with God. Such a revelation is the key to understand Mu Dan's poetry, which is different from Chinese modern Romanticists and Symbolists such as 郭沫若 Guo Moruo, 徐志摩 Xu Zhimo, 闻一多 Wen Yiduo (1899–1946) and 卞之琳 Bian Zhilin (1910–2000). It also shows the modernity and non-Chineseness of Mu Dan's writing. His poetry should be credited as profound in that it presents in modern and poetic Chinese the spiritual crisis and devotional exploration by his countrymen. This indicates that Chinese modern literature has reached out to Western modernism and has become a vital component of world literature since the 1940s.

Mu Dan did not convert to Christianity as did T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden and R.M. Rilke. For all his unremitting appeals, deep repentance and longing for God, he remained engaged in a relentless struggle, a prisoner in himself, as expressed in *Myself* (1941):

Myself

*Split from the womb, no more in warmth,
An incomplete part am I, yearning for help,
Forever myself, locked in the vast field,*

*Separated from the body of Many, out of a still dream,
I ache in the flow of Time, catching hold of nothing,
Incessant recollections do not bring back me.*

*Meeting a part of me we cry together,
The mad joy of first love, but breaking out of prison,
I stretch both hands only to embrace*

*An image in my heart, which is deeper despair,
Forever myself, locked in the vast field,
Hate mother for separating me from the dream.*

We can speculate that in the view of Mu Dan, the womb is the only warm and happy home in human life. Once a person loses contact with that paradise, he becomes like the banished Adam or Eve locked in the lost paradise. The divided, exiled and incomplete self can never obtain a truly peaceful and perfect happiness from God unless it assumes absolute self-abasement and repentance. Unfortunately, Mu Dan did not choose Christianity as his personal ingrained faith. Rather, he absorbed it merely as an intellectual and cultural resource and used it to gain a broader perspective for examining and criticizing the fragmentation, digression and complexity of modern society. The sinologist Marián Gálík states: "As a majority of others for whom *the Bible* was a 'fountain

of living waters' (Jeremiah, 17, 13), he (Mu Dan) was not a Christian. For him *the Bible*, its stories and teachings, was a matter of admiration, its literary, aesthetic and ethical values, complementary to those of the whole Judeo-Christian, but also indigenous Chinese world.¹⁷ Reasons for this can be found in historical, cultural and political arenas, but no matter the reasons, the fact is that most modern Chinese writers, including Mu Dan, are unable to believe in the Christian God. They ardently courted a cultural Christianity deriving from Western culture, borrowing prototypes and images from the *Holy Bible* to construct their writings, but refusing conversion.

In conclusion, Mu Dan's poetry, although enjoying a transcendent and metaphysical perspective of Christianity, which took on a strikingly profound vision with outstanding insight, pitifully failed to ignite an everlasting light in Mu Dan or to bring forth a fountainhead for his countrymen to find their way to God. We can say that Mu Dan was original and creative because he innovatively incorporated a Christian element into Chinese modern literature and created a Chinese expression for Christian discourse. Yet, Mu Dan was unhappy in that he was confined to a split-self and struggle, unable to break free from its abyss into a permanent paradise. This is a tragedy for both Mu Dan and for the Chinese. To me, it is undeniable that a nation without faith in God will suffer from the vacuum of spirit and will incur misfortune. I agree with Lev Shestov's statement that "[i]ntellect longing for a universally reliable truth shall lead to demise. His perfect way shall be acquired through believing in God".¹⁸ And now, once again, it is time for the Chinese to turn around and listen to God's voice as Mu Dan writes in his *Revelation*: "O let us open our eyes, my Saviour."

REFERENCES

- HOPPER, Stanley Romaine *Xinyang de Weiji* 《信仰的危机》 *The Crisis of Faith*, Trans. by Qu Xutong 瞿旭彤译, Peking: Religion and Culture Press 2006. *The Crisis of Faith* was published by Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, New York, Nashville 1944.
- GÁLIK, Marián "The Bible as a Source of Modern Chinese Poetry: From Zhou Zuoren to Haizi." In *From National Tradition to Globalization. From Realism to Post-Modernism*. Saint-Petersburg: Saint-Petersburg State University 2004, pp. 42–74, translated as 《圣经》对中国现代诗歌的影响：从周作人到海子”， *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Luncong* 《中国现代文学论丛》第一卷，第二期 *Modern Chinese Literature*. Vol. 1, No. 2, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2007, pp. 105–125.

¹⁷ Cf. GÁLIK, Marián "The Bible as a Source of Modern Chinese Poetry", p. 60 and its Chinese version, p. 118.

¹⁸ SHESTOV, Lev op.cit., p. 1.

- GÁLIK, Marián *Influence, Translation and Parallels, Selected Studies on the Bible in China*. Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute, 2004.
- LIU, Xiaofeng 刘晓枫 *Zhenjiu Yu Xiaoyao 《拯救与逍遥》 Delivering and Dallying*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1988.
- LIU, Yan 刘燕 "If We Could Only See Him: Christian Discourse in Mudan's *Revelation*." In *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture: Aesthetic Theology*. Ed. by Yang Huilin & Luo Bingxiang 杨慧林、罗秉祥主编《基督教文化学刊: 审美的神学》), Autumn 2008, No. 20. Beijing: Religion Culture Press 2008, pp. 254-285.
- MU, Dan 穆旦 *Mu Dan Wen Ji 《穆旦文集》 Anthology of Mu Dan*. Beijing: the People's Literature Publishing House, 2006.
- OTT, Heinrich 奥特, *Shang Di 《上帝》 God*. Trans. by Zhu Bingyan & Ma Yalin. 朱雁冰、冯亚琳译. Shenyang: Liaoning Education Press 1988. *God* was published by John Knox Press, Richmond, 1974.
- SHESTOV, Lev 舍斯托夫, *She Si Tuo Fu Wenji 《舍斯托夫文集》 The Anthology of Lev Shestov*. Edit. by Fang Shan 方珊主编. Shanghai: Shanghai Far East Press, 1998.
- RYKEN, Leland 里兰得·来肯, *Renshi Shengjing Wenxue 《认识<圣经>文学》 How to Read the Bible as Literature*. Trans. by Li Yiwei 李一为译. Nanchang: Jiangxi People's Publishing House 2007. *How to Read the Bible as Literature* was originally published by The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A. 1984.
- BAR-EFRAT, Shimon 西蒙·巴埃弗拉特, *Shengjing de xushi yishu 《圣经的叙事艺术》 Narrative Art in the Bible*. Trans. by Li Feng 李锋译. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press 2006. *Narrative Art in the Bible* was published by Sheffield Academic Press, 1989; T & T Clark International 2004.