

Study of Comparative Poetic Thought of Guo Moruo's *Goddess*

Yuan Li^{1,2}

¹College of Chinese Language & Literature, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China

²College of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China

Email: 70544424@qq.com

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Abstract

Guo Moruo's *Goddess* has received attention from various sectors and has become one of the hot spots in study of modern Chinese literature since it is published. It exerts far-reaching ideological influence. Tracing to its source, it is not difficult to find the rich implication in *Goddess's* creative thought, incorporation of both eastern and western life philosophic thinking and its skillful fusion of them. In the view of eastern and western comparison, Guo Moruo combines Bergson's life philosophy, Spinoza's pantheism and Goethe's "Faust spirit" with China's traditional life philosophy and forms his own poetic style. Such unique creation had opened new chapter of comparative poetics in China's poetic circle in the 20th century.

Keywords

Comparative Poetics, Life Philosophy, *Goddess*

1. Introduction

In China of the early 20th century, traditional oriental culture had unprecedented change. Scholars, the earliest western learning translators, represented by Lu Xun and Guo Moruo et al., became leading figures in the thought circle during this period. Some scholars probed into Guo Moruo's poetry translation "Creative Treason" (Wang, 2009: p. 122) from the perspective of the variation theory of comparative literature. The author of this paper holds the view that the comparative thinking not only is reflected in Guo Moruo's translation, but also affects his literary creation and even his constructing of poetic theoretical system. Under the overall background in which culture intensely collided with thinking, Guo Moruo integrated eastern with western life philosophy thinking and applied it to poetry creation in a creative and inclusive manner, which made him lead the trend of this period and opened the creation of new poetry based on his collection of poems *Goddess*. He also became one of the repre-

sentatives who first used comparative poetic thought to create poetries. Professor Cao Shunqing clearly proposed that “comparative poetics discover human beings’ consistent cognition on common literature or discover difference to stimulate new cognition in mutual observation through study of world’s national literary theories” (Cao, 2010: p. 278). Through a careful analysis, it could be found that Guo Moruo’s comparative poetics absorbed and referred to western poetic thought based on traditional life philosophy thinking and further formed poetic system on the basis of life experience theory. Exchange and dialogue of individual civilization couldn’t ignore the occurrence of “cultural filtering”. It was also the same in literary reception and theoretical reception. The so-called “cultural filtering” refers to the literary influence that the receivers in literary communication due to their different cultural background and cultural traditional, such as selection, transformation, transplantation and penetration exchange” (Cao, 2010: p. 98). Faced with alien culture, acceptance subject would make selective acceptance from every factor that constituted him such as language, cultural tradition and national psychology. China’s modern literature writers both individual and group in the early 20th century carried out cultural filtering of western culture, including embedded exchange and dialogue of western poetic theory. “To truly adapt to other countries’ soil and integrate with other countries’ literary theoretical tradition, the key is to utilize “discourse” of your own country’s (refer to receivers—inducer) literary theory to absorb and integrate with it” (Cao, 2010: p. 157).

2. Comparative Poetic Thought in *Goddess*

2.1. Life Philosophy of Bergson and Universe Creation Concept of the Taoist School—Poetic Ontology Thought

Guo Moruo put forward the concept of life poetry in Philosophy of Life, “Life isn’t completely different from literature. Life is the essence of literature” (Guo, 1983: p.3). Such thought is reflected in repeated appearance of “life” in *Goddess*. “Life” appears about 21 times in the book and 10 times in the first volume. In the Sorrow of River Xiang, the poet said via the mouth of Qu Yuan, “My poetry, my poetry is my life! How could I abuse my life, my precious life, and let it be abused by others? I model after the spirit of the Creator, I create freely, and I express myself freely. I create dignified mountain, magnificent ocean and the sun, moon and stars. I go through wind, cloud, thunder and rain. Though I only have one body, it can be spread throughout the universe” (Guo, 1998: p. 21). The poet started from confirming the life and further confirmed the status of ontology of literature, which helped him release his anxiety towards the country’s future development to enlighten the wisdom of the people through literature.

Chen Duxiu once warned all young people, “Life is like sailing against the current, either you keep forging ahead or you keep falling behind. That is a common saying in China. Just like the fundamental law of universe said, all things on heaven and earth are developing and evolving all the time. Nothing is invariable and remains its status quo. Everything is contained by worldly views, and it is called as two states, which is also the ‘Theory of Creative Evolution’ made by French contemporary philosopher H. Bergson” (Dong, 1996: p. 88). In life philosophy thought of Bergson, he confirmed Elan Vital shared some similarities with Taoist philosophy in China’s traditional philosophical thought. This viewpoint offers support basis for modern development of China’s traditional life philosophy beyond doubts and the thought also shows that modern writers make selective acceptance of foreign culture from the comparison perspective, which is also the embodiment of “literature domestication” (Cao, 2010: p. 149). Literature domestication refers to different culture inevitably experiencing the process from collision to exchange in the exchange process and making re-creation in the process of filtering and misreading, while this process also has to be established in making localized transformation of other countries’ different culture based on our national culture. The process of transformation is the embodiment of bidirectional interaction. On the one hand, it is not only the localization of other countries’ culture, but also the acceptance of domestic appropriation of our national culture. New Literature Movement during May Fourth Period is exactly the embodiment of such interaction. *Goddess* of Guo Moruo fully revealed the influence of multi-culture on him in the cultural collision between new culture and old culture and between eastern culture and western culture. New poetry creation during May Fourth Period required emancipating minds, breaking traditional rules limitation and fully expressing feelings. On this basis, new poetry writers represented by Guo Moruo actively adopted the creation form, view and rule of western poetry to re-construct poetry, leading to China’s modern poetry walk on the path of completely deviating from traditional poetry. In the meantime, the acceptance of western poetic viewpoints was still established in the foundation of China’s traditional poetic theory. He used “rebirth” in Taoist

thought to interpret Bergson's life philosophy. The story of "The Goddess Mending the Sky" in *Rebirth of Goddess* was derived from Huai Nan Tzu. The emphasis and confirmation of thought in Huai Nan Tzu of life was exactly the inheritance and development of "rebirth" thought of Pre-Qin Taoism. *Goddess* is also the embodiment of this thought from the name of poetry to creation content of poetry.

Laozi holds the view that the principle of the world is "Tao", "There was something formless yet complete, that existed before heaven and earth; without sound, without substance, dependent on nothing, unchanging, all pervading, unailing. One may think of it as the mother of all things under heaven. Its true name we do not know. I was forced to say to what class of things it belongs. I should call it Great. Now also means passing on, and passing on means going far away, and going far away means returning" (Chen, 1984: p. 163). That is to say, "Tao" is an elemental chaos existing before heaven and earth. It doesn't depend on any external force; it is subtle yet it exists objectively; it is the fundamental to all things; it is nor static nor motionless; it is extensive and boundless; it flows round without stop and stretches far away and then returns to nature; it is in everlasting movements of "passing on", "far away" and "returning". It can be regarded as the centralized revealing of plain dialectical materialism in ancient China. On the basis of Laozi's theory, Zhuangzi further explained "Tao" and interpreted "one" in "Tao gave birth to the One" as "all things were born by air". "Air" is divided into yin and yang. "Growth of all things is as if horses run and carriages drive. They are changing and moving all the time" (Wang, 1987: p. 218). He confirmed the fact that all things are in a changing state all the time and further developed Laozi's thought on all things are in motion. It shared some similarity with Bergson who thought vital impulse is the fundamental to the production of all things in the world and all things are in perpetual motion and change. Such similarity promoted ideologists during May Fourth Period to successively use Bergson's life philosophy concept to oppose against closeness and corruption in feudalism culture. Guo Moruo once said, "I have already finished reading the Theory of Creative Evolution earlier. I learned that some Bergson's thought was born out of Goethe. In my view, artists easily tend to agree with "the philosophy of life" (Guo, 1990: p. 55). Bergson is the epitome of western life philosophy in modern times. In his opinion, intuition is a way of people's cognition and goes deep into the object's inner life in a direct manner to achieve the highest level of the identity about the matter and me. He believed that people can only communicate with nature of the world based on irrational intuition. One of the most significant concepts of Bergson's life philosophy is "durée", which is an ancient name of time in French. "Durée" is different from traditional time sense and can't be disintegrated. It is not a certain property abstracted from movement, but flows like river and an inseparable and changing movement process formed by mutual penetration and cross of various stages. In the *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson used the image of flow to describe the flow condition of world and life, thinking the essence of world is in motion and creation. Starting from "durée", he attributed the formation of all things in the world into life impulse, whose "durée" is also in constant motion and change. He treated art as an intuition and life never repeats itself. Under the influence of Bergson's life philosophy, Guo Moruo directly used "the fountain of life" to express the passion and power of life development in works such as *Sorrow of River Xiang* and *Celebrating Brothers' Reunion*. For instance, "Flow, flow, the spring of my life, Once you flow out, it is as if you extinguish the raging fire in my whole body" (Guo, 1998: p. 25), As another example, "What pass away and never turn is the mother we depend on. It is the life fountain we have longed for several years" (Guo, 1998: p. 66-67). Guo Moruo used Chinese traditional historical theme to express the song of praise of life, show the desire for humanity emancipation and freedom development and fully reveal that art can't be repeatedly released by life passion, thinking only such poetry can break through the traditional and stiff poetry creation. Guo Moruo directly understood Bergson's life as vitality and energy, thinking literature is the embodiment of life root spirit and "energy is in motion and continuous convergence and divergence" (Guo, 1983: p. 3).

2.2. Pantheism of Spinoza and "On the Equality of Things" of Zhuangzi—Thought of Poetic Realm Theory

Through exploring Guo Moruo's poetic view, it is found his transformation of Bergson's life philosophy was just a part of his acceptance of western advanced culture and it also included thoughts of Spinoza and Goethe and so on. Just like what he said, "Previously, the world in my eyes is just a graphic drawing of death. Now it comes to life and becomes a subject as exquisite as rock quartz. I always like reading Zhuangzi, but I only appreciate his diction and ignore his meaning. I can't understand his meaning. At this moment, I understand him thoroughly. I know what "Tao" and "Hua" mean. From then on, I am led to Laozi, Confucius philosophy and

especially Spinoza, so I found an all-directional solemn world” (Guo, 1982: p. 289). The so-called “like rock quartz” is actually the highest state in life experience and poetic life after surpass over the limited reality. The poet wrote in *Three Pantheists*. “I love Zhuangzi of China because I love his pantheism; I love Spinoza of the Netherlands because I love his pantheism; I love Kabir of India because I love his pantheism” (Guo, 1998: p. 44).

In the poetry, Guo Moruo put Zhuangzi, Spinoza and Gail together, showing his integration and fusion of eastern culture and western culture in thoughts. Pantheism is a philosophical view equating natural world with God to stress the supremacy of natural world, thinking God exists in everything in natural world without additional supernatural domination or spiritual power. Pantheism was popular in Western Europe from 16th century to 18th century, and Spinoza was one of the representatives.

“Pantheism is atheism. Nature is just a manifestation of God, and I am just a manifestation of God. I am the God, so nature is a manifestation of me. When human being reaches the state of no-self, fuses with God and surpass time and space and treats birth as death. People have sense of grief of life and death when they have self understanding and see all things in universe, change in self external image and variability of extinction” (Guo, 1990: p. 313).

Here, Guo Moruo specifically talked about his understanding of pantheism. This was more an absorption of China’s traditional life philosophy and an interpretation of pantheism than an interpretation of Spinoza’s pantheism, which helped “On the Equality of All Things” of Zhuangzi, and it was exactly the manifestation of occurrence of “cultural filtering”. What Guo Moruo tried to express was exactly the highest state of life experience, which surpassed death’s threat to human being and gained the sense of life freedom and filling. Its essence was the expression of thought of Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi advocated cordial and confertus relationship between human being and nature and destroyed mutual confrontation in compliance of all things and the identity about matter and me, while the subject and object formed a dependence relationship. “We have no idea is it Zhuang Zhou dreaming of turning into a butterfly or the butterfly dreaming of turning into Zhuang Zhou” (Wang, 1987: p. 42). “Heaven, Earth and I come into being together, and all things and I are one” (Wang, 1987: p. 30). Such ideas and the thought of oneness of all life were reflected in Guo Moruo’s confirmation of ego and individual value and advocacy of personality spirit in this poetry creation. In Guo Moruo’s opinion, Zhuangzi’s thought of “compliance of all things” was a manifestation of pantheism. It equated Zhuangzi’s thought with pantheism and even specifically put forward, “Since I always like Zhuangzi and I am close to Tagore, I am greatly affected by the thought of pantheism. Hence, my works are close to works of the great philosopher of Europe Spinoza and poetry of German poet Goethe” (Guo, 1983: p. 204). Just as what has been universally accepted in educational circle that Guo Moruo’s poetic thought was influenced by the Indian poet Tagore. Poetry of Tagore was filled with romanticism of intimacy of human being and nature, which exerted profound impact of China’s modern poets during May Fourth Period. Poetry of Tagore included India’s traditional pantheism thought, namely the concept of “Brahmatmatitym”, in which “Brahman” is the fundamental of world. Tagore used limited things such as nature, phenomenal world and people’s spirit to explain Brahman or God that represent the infinity. In fact, it yearned for harmony of man and man, man and nature and man and world and further drove poet to measure all things in natural world with the vision of identity of object and self. When Guo Moruo made a comparative study of these three things, he found their similarity and further stimulated his deeply understanding of the substantive characteristics of art.

Jin Yuelin once pointed out that “‘Man and nature are integrated’ in the highest and most extensive meaning refers to the subject blends into the object, or the object blends into the subject. Stick to fundamental identity and eliminate all significant differences to achieve the state of consistency of individual and universe” (Jin, 1985). Zhuangzi once said, “Today I forgot myself. Do you know that? You have heard of the sound emitted from Chinese instrumentals but never heard of the sound of wind blowing the earth. Even though you’ve heard of the sound of wind blowing the earth but never heard of the sound of natural life” (Wang, 1987: p. 14). “I forgot myself” means forgetting surroundings and even oneself, surpassing the utility of reality and reaching the state of identity of object and self. “I forgot myself” of Zhuangzi is an absolute freedom of “depending on no one”. The ideology of Zhuangzi was exactly established in “Man and nature are integrated”. Such freedom and liberation of spirit of “depending on no one” is not only the highest level of life experience, but also the highest level of aesthetics, and this is what the poet Guo Moruo expected and called. The poet expressed increasing disappointment and dissatisfaction towards the reality and society and further turned to yearning for life and nature with excited feelings. “Earth, you are my mother! I want everything in this universe to be your incarnation;

thunderbolt is the prestige of your breath and snow and rain is the soaring of your blood” (Guo, 1998: p. 48). The writer revealed his advocacy of life philosophy ideology in the poetry that “everything has life and even inorganic substance has life” (Guo, 1983: p. 3), expressed his desire for freedom release of life and called for realization of individual value. The poem Phoenix Nirvana drew materials from the ancient Arabian mythology. The phoenix became a representative of undead spirit in mythology. Nirvana is a transliterating in Sanskrit, means passing away and Buddhists reached the perfect and round state through long-term practice. It compared to the rebirth of phoenix. These two images symbolizing rebirth were combined together. What Guo Moruo tried to express was his expectation on overturn of the old society and rise of state as well as yearning for freedom state of life.

2.3. “Faust Spirit” of Goethe and “Peripateticism” of Zhuangzi—Thought of Poetic Expression Theory

Guo Moruo’s unique poetic expression theory has been formed under the comparative vision, which was generally reflected in his blunt expression of internal emotions, use of bold imagination and bizarre exaggeration to show his spiritual pursuit. Most of his poetry forms were free bodies without fixed rhythm and stressed on harmony and consistency of poetry’s inner emotional rhythm and rhyme. It was different from patterns of manifestation’s aesthetic orientation of traditional poems which couldn’t be formed without changing and concluding, level and oblique tones, antithesis or rhythm. Huge contrast between reality environment and hope caused spiritual depression and anxiety to the poet, which was fully showed in the *Goddess*. “The dead light comes alive, the dead universe comes alive, we come alive, we come alive and everything comes alive” (Guo, 1998: p. 50). This poem revealed desire for growth of new things and thoughts on extinction of old things and paid more attention to expression of emotions rather than form orderliness. He cried in the poetry sky dog, “I am a sky dog! I am the end of all stars, I am the X-ray and I am the total energy of the whole universe” (Guo, 1998: p. 49). In the work, the author escalated himself to an equal status with “God” and endowed the subject spirit with extremely high status to resist against depressed self in reality, and this was also common voice of scholars during May Fourth Period. Such ideology was also reflected in works including *Summoning by the Edge of the Earth* and *Bathing in the Ocean*. The author called upon national awakening with the spirit of hurricane movement and used bizarre exaggeration and rich imagination to portray the rhythm of life.

Poetry with passionate representation style is not rare in Chinese traditional poetry and can’t be found in works of Zhuangzi, Qu Yuan, Li Bai and Su Shi. Tracing to its source, it was closely related to philosophical view that took life experience as the fundamental in ancient China. Such philosophy regarded the art as people’s objectification product of subject life. “Conforming to the nature of the universe and mastering change in six climates of nature, people who wander around the boundless realm, what should they depend on?” (Wang, 1987: p. 5-6). This was a state surpassing worldly reality and contacting with heaven and earth spirit and a state filled with sense of life freedom and filling. The spirit of heaven and earth “excursion” on later generations exerted profound and huge impact on later generations and became common aesthetic life state that Chinese traditional literati and officialdom pursued. At the same time, “Set your mind at flight by going along with things as they are. Cultivate your mind by resigning yourself to the inevitable. Comply with natural laws and become selfless” (Wang, 1987: p. 112). This is an embody Tao, excursion Tao and a “state of Tao”. Such state is where the life ultimate lies and possesses the traits of people’s spiritual home. Ancient Chinese poetry stresses on soul feelings and requires the subject to directly perceive the true meaning of life in a clarified aesthetic state of mind. In the poetry creation, the poet Guo Moruo is good at applying techniques such as imagination and exaggeration, which could be seen from his formula of poetry creation “poetry = (inhalt) + (form)” (Guo, 1983: p. 238). It can be seen from *Goddess* that Guo Moruo used feelings filled with imagination to freely wander around eastern and western culture and collected various themes to make poetry more colorful and show broad scene such as *Celebrating Brothers’ Reunion*, in the *Electricity Mist*, the *Ode to Bandit* and *Venus*.

Just like “being assiduous in book writing” and “injustice provokes outcry” contained in Chinese traditional literati spirit, Guo Moruo vented his “depressed emotion” and “realized his wishes” through poetry. It can be seen from the creation style of *Goddess* that the writer’s inner heart was filled with compulsive emotional impulse and profound experience. Hence, it not only showed the style of imagination and exaggeration, but also included affectionate and delicate talking, thus making it possess the beauty of music. Poetry creation generally manifests passion and even craziness. Guo Moruo had that condition and he once said, “On the forenoon that

day, I ran to Fukuoka Library to read and suddenly had the urge for poetic creation. Therefore, I ran out of the library and walked up and down on the cobbled road on bare foot behind the library. It is a little crazy as I think of it, but at that time, I felt the urge to do it" (Guo, 1983: p. 204). In western countries, Plato of ancient Greek noticed such phenomenon of being controlled by passion in creation and he called it craziness. When the poet was immersed in the passionate windstorm, he couldn't help himself, causing the writer's analytical ability and self-control weakened and perceptual impulsion suddenly strengthened, thus resulting in the so-called "craziness state". "Urge for poetic creation" mentioned by Guo Moruo was a passionate surge of creation, so much so that the poet wanted to "become intimate with 'earth mother'". "Craziness" theory of Plato had profound impact on late generations of western countries. In Plato's opinion, poet under inspiration control would have "craziness". "Inspiration" in ancient Greek also means "passion". Shelley once said, "People can't say 'I want to create a poem'", and even the greatest poet can't say words like that because people's mind is as if a ball of dying charcoal fire. Some invisible power is just like changeable wind and incites its instant flame" (Liu, 1984: p. 153). Excellent poet often writes when his soul is filled with weird passion and enthusiasm. In Guo Moruo's Discussion on Creation, Guo Moruo thought the reason why he created *The Ode to Bandit, Sky Dog, Morning, Summoning by the Edge of the Earth* was his response to the hurricane thought during May Fourth period since "that poem symbolizes the rebirth of China and also the rebirth of myself. The finalizing of the poetic language was affected by Wagner Opera and it attempted to create musical poetry, but from the stance of psychopathology, it clearly shows neuropathic breaking out, which is perhaps the so-called inspiration" (Guo, 1983: p. 205). The symbol of romanticism in Germany was the rise of Sturm und Drang. One of the representatives of Sturm und Drang ideology was Goethe. Goethe fully expressed the thought to the requirement for giving full play to people's subjective initiative and realizing the liberation of personality in *Faust*. Guo Moruo during May Fourth period translated this masterpiece of Goethe. There was no doubt that his thought was closely related to western traditional "inspiration" and "passion" theory. Goethe shaped *Faust* into a character that made continuous exploration and pursuit and had positive and struggling spirit. His life pursuit became the refraction of the ideological exploration course of bourgeois progressive intellectuals, fully revealed the poet Goethe's life passion for romanticism and yearned for getting rid of the corrupted and dark society. Such thought had directly affected the translator Guo Moruo and formed his creation style that used the past to allude to the present and filled with imagination and passion. The poetic drama *Rebirth of Goddess* even directly quoted sentences in *Faust* in the opening. The poetry used the story of *Goddess* giving up mending the sky and unwilling to save the incorrigible society but to place hope in creating a new sun for the new world to express his complete fight against the filthy reality. "We let it destroy and don't mend it. When our newly created sun shows up, it will fully shine the world inside and outside the sky. The limit of sphere will be useless" (Guo, 1998: p. 13). The creation of Guo Moruo's historical play was also affected by Goethe, such as *Qu Yuan*, *Catilla* and *Cai Wenji*. Guo Moruo pointed out in *Create a Decade*, "I was affected by Goethe when I started creating poetic drama. After I translated the first *Faust*, soon I created *Celebrating Brothers' Reunion*, *Rebirth of Goddess* and *Sorrow of River Xiang* and *Two Sons of Gu Zhujun* were completed under the influence" (Guo, 1996: p. 111). It can be seen that Guo Moruo's poetry both had eastern life philosophy thought and western life philosophy thought and formed his own poetic system. Just as Wu Shizhao once pointed out, "the literary concept of 'May Fourth' theory of expression is the result of interaction among western trend of thought in literature and art, era needs and traditional poetry. Just because of this, it gains the discourse feature of similar concepts distinguishing western literary concept from Chinese traditional poetry" (Wu, 2002: p. 143).

3. Conclusion

In the turn of the 20th century, Nietzsche, one of the representatives of western life philosophy, made complete criticism on the western traditional philosophy of rationalism supremacy and opened the diversion towards western life philosophy. It could be regarded as the embodiment of western philosophy drifting to oriental philosophy inevitably. When western modern philosophy abandoned the doctrine of rational supremacy, turned its sight to reality life, laid emphasis on emotion and confirmed the subject value, it also lighted up the hope of Chinese literati who were fighting against the shackle of feudalism ethics morals, helped them discover western philosophy's confirmation of life, catered to their mentality to yearn for changing the current status and pursuing for freedom and liberation. These ideologies shared some similarities with traditional philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi, helping them to take a comparative vision to view the western life philosophy thought and to use Chinese traditional life philosophy concept to make selective absorption and integration. On this basis, it could

be said that *Goddess* was more than a piece of poetry for it offered an example for the rise of modern comparative poetics.

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