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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE POEMS OF BEI DAO AND YANG LIAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF “JIN JIANG DAI HU”

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ABSTRACT

Bei Dao and Yang Lian are renowned exiled poets of Chinese origin; they were forced to go into exile at different junctures after 1989 and finally became naturalized citizens of other countries. Their poetry published in different periods is inundated with such complex and subtle feelings as their sense of belonging, sense of identity, and sense of loss toward their homeland, it also provides a good literary corpus in tracking their poetic development in different periods. In Chinese culture, “Jin Jiang Dai Hu” is often seen as a liminal space existing between different cultures, where the cultural interaction and negotiation take place. Despite having returned to China for visits since their effective displacement in 1989, both Yang Lian and, more prominently, Bei Dao unmistakably embody the essence of poets in exile. In a parallel vein, one could construct an argument for interpreting Wang Jiaxin's stay in England as another instance of exile, reflecting the complexities of cultural and personal dislocation. They can be seen as cultural cosmopolitans whose poetry transcends the cultural and national limits. It enabled us to see how they reconcile the differences and bridge the interstices between different cultures through the perspective of “Jin Jiang Dai Hu”.

KEYWORDS: Comparative Study, Exiled Poets, Sense of Belonging.

1. INTRODUCTION

In China from 1960s to 1970s, there was a group of rebellious young intellectuals who gradually became displeased with several orthodox, conformist, and socialist literature. Bei Dao (1949) and Yang Lian (1955) are the most renowned representatives, meanwhile, at the end of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, they provided a relatively relaxed literary environment for their literary creation. Some of the representatives voluntarily formed their "underground cultural salons", exchanging their experimental poetry that was later called as "Misty" poetry and became the prominent representative of the Chinese avant-garde literature. van Crevel (1996) argues that the term "Misty" is actually a derogatory one given by Chinese mainstream literary critics then for its elusive meaning and opaque images, which was in stark contrast with the prevailing clarity at that period, moreover, Misty poets mainly focused on individual feelings instead of the collective voice prescribed by the authorities. As the younger generation, these Misty poets became disillusioned with the Cultural Revolution, and they tried to pursue self-worth, however, the 1983 Anti-Spiritual Pollution targeted such Misty poets as Bei Dao and Yang Lian for their deprecation of Chinese traditional literature and forbade them to come back to their homeland. During this period, Bei Dao was having a series of visits to European countries, after he became disillusioned with the possibility of returning to his homeland, he became an American citizen in 2009 after many years of exile. A few years younger than Bei Dao, Yang Lian almost follows the same track as Bei Dao, he was also forbidden to return to his homeland while he was a visiting scholar in New Zealand, and he accepted New Zealand citizenship in 1993.

Bei Dao, Yang Lian raised in an environment in which both of them were greatly influenced by Chinese culture and traditions therefore they formed an interdependent and socio-centric personalities. On the one hand a special bond between themselves and their homeland is made, in this sense, it is safe to state that being sent to exile is the most fearful penalty for them, their self-knowledge which consists of personal feelings, memories of the past, and most importantly, acknowledgment of others, is severely challenged after they went into exile. During their early exile years, being deprived of citizenship, they were once homeless, they moved and sojourned from place to place. After several years of exile, they finally settled and became naturalized citizens in different countries, however, since there is a special bond exist between themselves and their native land,

the poetry of them is inundated with such complex and subtle feelings as their sense of belonging, sense of identity, sense of loss toward their homeland, sense of defiance, and resistance against power before and after the exile, in the meantime, there are tensions between these different senses and feelings. The tension between the sense of belonging and sense of alienation already existed even before they went into exile. They developed the so-called "double consciousness" while holding multiple social identities, presenting a complex process of negotiation of their identities. In the meantime, since all three poets were under the great influence of Chinese traditional culture, there was also a sense of cultural alienation when they became naturalized citizens. In a word, all their complex feelings and senses are demonstrated in their poems created in different periods of their lives, providing a good literary corpus for the study of the poetry of Chinese exile poets. A close reading and thorough analysis of their works written in different periods of their lives will provide a good lens for a better understanding of this special group from a more comprehensive perspective while enabling us to know how they reconcile Oriental and Occidental elements through the process of "Jin Jiang Dai Hu". A Chinese phrase denoting the different cultural process of the cultural interactions between multiple cultures, it can be seen as a combination of such different concepts as cultural negotiation, cultural cosmopolitanism, and liminal space. By employing the idea of "Jin Jiang Dai Hu", it is possible to track their psychological experience in different periods. The Chinese term "Jin Jiang Dai Hu" can be used here to replace the concepts mentioned above in that it vividly describes different processes of cultural interaction, repulsion, and negotiation. This term is initially used to describe the intersection of rivers and lakes, the rivers and lakes symbolize different cultures. There may be repulsion and rejection in the initial phase of intersection, but they will merge into one eventually, during the process, as there will be a "plain" or "buffer zone" created by the interactions of rivers and lakes, which can be seen as a liminal space in which new identity may come into formation.

Wang Jiaxin's experience can be viewed as less exilic, and he stayed outside China was relatively brief as compared to those of two other poets Bei Dao or Yang. The work of Jiaxin remained untouched by orthodox criticism in China. However, several events triggered his departure to the UK. Such as, the June Fourth Incident and the ensuing cultural purge with the significant cultural contrasts between China and England. In Wang's case, it's important to consider

what Tabori describes as the fluid nature of exile, which allows for the possibility of its conclusion and, therefore, its retrospective characterization as a temporary condition (Van Crevel 2008, pp. 137-186).

In short, the theory of intertextuality serves as a foundation for studying what kind of transformation they have made to Chinese traditional literature. Throughout Chinese literature history, critics and poets have employed strategies similar to intertextuality to inform their reading and writing practices. These approaches have been influential in shaping literary discourse across different dynasties Chang, H.L., (2007). As with all conceptual terms, its foundational text has transitioned from a concrete meaning to a more abstract interpretation. The employment of cultural psychology will further reveal their development of the sense of self, sense of identity, emotions, cognition and perceptions before and after exile. Cultural psychology actually leverages comprehensive social science theories along with detailed insights derived from ethnographic and qualitative research methods Ratner, C., (2011). It focuses on gaining a descriptive understanding of human behavior within a cultural framework Kim, Yang & Hwang, (2006). Finally, through the process of “Jin Jiang Dai Hu”, it is possible to trace the psychological experience of these three poets in exile.

Bei Dao embodies a steadfast insularity and subtle resilience, traits mirrored by several figures within what might be termed a contemporary Chinese poetic framework. The creation of *Jintian* marked a pivotal moment for this collective identity, offering readers access to a substantial body of underground poetry previously excluded from mainstream publishing channels.

To track the poetic and psychological development of these three poets before and after the exile, in the case of Bei Dao and Yang Lian, the division line between their pre-exilic poetry and post-exilic poetry is the year 1989 when they were forbidden to return to their homeland. Therefore, the study will select the most representative poems in different periods to track the development of their poetry and psychological experiences. By analyzing the poems of these two poets, the study will focus on the psychological development in their poetry and how they reconcile the differences and bridge the interstices between different cultures.

2. BEI DAO'S POETIC DEVELOPMENT

The poetry of Bei Dao can be divided into three periods: the early period is from the 1970s to the 1980s. during this period, according to Michelle Yeh

(1992), his poetry is characterized by its “cryptic language”. The middle period is during the 1980s, a time before his exile and in the early phase of his exile. The later period is from the 1990s to present, a period when his poetry becomes much matured. The study will select the three most representative poems, which were published respectively in these three periods to track his poetic development.

2.1. The Early Period (From the 1970s to 1980s)

As a prominent representative of Misty poetry, Leo Ou-fan Lee (1994) believes that the early work of Bei Dao can be considered “a symbol of intellectual resistance” against the propagandistic style imposed by the authorities. The style of his poetry, according to Michelle Yeh (1991), is characterized by its “fractured syntax” as well as its “fragmentary imagery”, leading his poetry to become obscure and ambiguous, which is in stark contrast with the clear and unequivocal style proposed by the authorities, The Answer is a good case in point. The opening lines of the first stanza of the poem, “Debasement is the password of the base, “Nobility the epitaph of the noble”, criticize the oppression imposed by the society while eulogizing the lasting virtue of resistance. Then the following lines “See how the gilded sky is covered, /With the drifting twisted shadows of the dead.” present a vivid as well as cryptic images, such images as “gilded sky” and “twisted shadows of the dead” are profound metaphors which create a sense of de-familiarization. This kind of metaphor as well as skepticism can also be found in the second stanza, “The ice age is over now, /Why is there ice everywhere? /The Cape of Good Hope has been discovered, /Why do a thousand sails contest the Dead Sea?” The employment of repetition also merits our special attention, which illustrates the personal defiance of the poet, this repetition, according to Maghiel van Crevel (2005), is “an existential declaration of doubt”, which makes the poem permeate with doubt and skepticism. The poem does not end in despair, instead, the final lines of the poem, “Even if the victory does not belong to me, /I shall still insist on the truth.”, illustrate a determination to fight for victory even with great difficulties. In his another famous line, “If a thousand challengers lie beneath your feet, /Count me as number thousand and one.”. In this line, the oppression is personified, Gregory Lee (1995) argues that the technique of personification and symbolism plays an important role in binding the personal voice to political environment, abstract ideals to concrete experiences, and the interplay of abstract and concrete language

to the combination of abstract and concrete imagery.

As the introduction illustrates, Misty poets were greatly influenced by Western literature. Such foreign images as "the Cape of Good Hope" and "the Dead Sea" can also be found in *The Answer*, indicating there is a process of cultural negotiation going on even before Bei Dao's exile, in the meantime, the tension created by the domestic imagery and foreign imagery makes it appealing at home and abroad. Most importantly, the deliberate lack of political reference as well as historical events makes the poem transcend the limits of time and space.

In a word, as one of his most representative and resilient poems, *The Answer*, through the interplay of abstract and concrete imagery, and abstract and concrete language, the technique of personification, repetition, metaphors, metonymy, and complex symbolism, creates the tension between despair and hope, oppression and resistance.

Bei Dao's poem **The Answer** exemplifies Misty poetry's defiance against authoritarian propaganda through fragmented syntax, cryptic imagery, and metaphors of oppression and resistance. Employing repetition, personification, and Western references like "the Cape of Good Hope," the poem blends abstract ideals with concrete experiences, creating universal appeal and transcending political boundaries. Its tension between despair and hope reflects a resilient determination to seek truth despite oppression.

2.2. The Mid-Period (From the 1980s to the 1990s)

As aforementioned, the poetry of Bei Dao gradually takes on changes even before he was forced to go into exile. This period can be seen as transitional in studying the poetic development of Bei Dao, when he was caught in the early phase of Jin Jiang Dai Hu. Different cultures collide like rivers during the interaction, thus creating a liminal space, which, according to Homi Bhabha (1994), is a space where new identities come into formation during the process of cultural negotiation. because it transcends the limitations of binary opposition. The poetry of Bei Dao in this period became more personal and even secluded. Edward Gunn (1996) remarks that the focus of Bei Dao's poetry in this period gradually changed from "collective defiance" to such themes as his sense of alienation, reflection on mortality, existentialism, and sense of displacement. Meanwhile, his language became more abstract and was tinged with nostalgia and sense of alienation, moreover, his tone became more philosophical. His poem *Landscape Over Zero* is a good case in point.

On the title of the poem, Maghiel van Crevel (2008) comments that the state of "over zero" delineates Bei Dao's condition of being in-between. He "dwells" in a liminal space where his identity is suspended and the new identity is in the process of formation. on the other hand, can refer to the beginning as well as the end, while the landscape may refer to a metaphorical and abstract space in which the poet tackles such philosophical and existential questions as a sense of belonging and reconstruction of self. The line "The clouds cross over the edge of the horizon, / Over zero, into silence." describes a journey that transcends the national and cultural boundaries, while "silence" expresses the unspoken emotions and sense of alienation and displacement of the poet. The line "In the mirror, we are shadows of our past lives, / Reflected back into the present." reflects the poet's state of being caught between the present and the past, the reality and memories. Moreover, Bei Dao's reflection on the limitations of language is also illustrated in the poem, in the line. "The words scatter like dust in the wind, / And silence gathers at the borders of speech." The language has taken on the unreliable and fleeting role, while "the silence" as a recurring motif is much more powerful and emotional in expressing the sense of loss and displacement of the poet. Moreover, Edward Gunn (1996) notes that the post-exilic poetry of Bei Dao turns more introspective as well as existential, trying to reconstruct his sense of identity in a fragmented world, the "Where does the road lead, if not to the self? / Over zero, we walk toward infinity." not only illustrates the philosophical tone in the poem but expresses the importance of constructing the sense of self, moreover, "walk toward infinity" denotes the poet's existential reflection.

Maghiel van Crevel (2008) argues that by employing fragmented memory and fleeting images, this poem reflects the self-meditation of the poet in an uncertain and fragmented world, in the meantime, his poetic focus in this period has shifted from political and collective freedom to such existential reflections on the self and mind. On the other hand, Edward Gunn (1996) notices Bei Dao's increasing focus on the limitations of language and the tension between time and memory, moreover, his poetic themes become more philosophical and existential.

The poem illustrates the poetic changes going on in the poetry of Bei Dao in the mid-period in which his exilic experience has played an important role, in summary. Although his poetry is still tinged with political elements, the once declarative and heroic voice now takes on philosophical and meditative

tone, in the meantime. This transitional mid-period plays a significant role in tracking the poetic development and the psychological experience of Bei Dao.

Jiixin harnesses the power of imagination to evoke a sense of internal in "soil inside you that flows down heavy". Here, imagery doesn't replace reality but blends seamlessly with the poem's realist elements, creating a natural harmony within Wang's broader body of work. The poems contrasting elements happen in fog-bound London and pounding rain outside versus the homeland and soil within—reflect this balance. Symbols of exile in both the poem and Wang's life transform 泥土 ("soil, clay, earth") into an echo of 乡土 ("native soil"), a fundamental marker of displacement. This imagery draws its subtle strength not from explicit mentions of exile but from the unspoken emotional depth it suggests (Van Crevel 2008, pp. 137-186).

During his transitional mid-period, Bei Dao's poetry shifts from collective defiance to introspective, existential themes, reflecting his exilic experiences and sense of alienation. His work, such as *Landscape Over Zero*, captures the liminal space between past and present, where fragmented memories and philosophical reflections shape his evolving identity.

2.3. *The Late Period (from the 1990s to 2000s)*

After years of adaptation to Western literary context, the poetry of Bei Dao has reached its maturity, according to Maghiel van Crevel (2008), the poetry of Bei Dao in this period gradually loses the once defiant and declarative political confrontation illustrated in the early period. Instead, in the face of gigantic historical forces, limitations of language, and fleeting time, he tries to make a reconciliation with them through his poetry. His poetry not only continues to take on the personal and psychological tone in his mid-period, it even becomes metaphysical at this point. At the *Sky's Edge* (2001) is a poem that encapsulates almost all the elements mentioned above, the title itself merits our special attention, the image "edge" may refer to a dilemma superficially, but it actually denotes the in-between state of the poet, which is a common predicament faced by most of those in exile.

In the opening line of the first stanza, "I've always believed that when all the lamps in the night sky go out", "the night sky" is a recurring motif in the poetry of Bei Dao. In the later period, it may refer to the vast universe on the one hand, it can also denote the inner world of the poet. Indicates the insignificance of human in the face of the universe and the existential

reflection of the poet himself. In the meantime, the broken and fragmentary images in the poem, according to Michael Duke (1989), Bei Dao's sense of disillusionment is always conveyed by his employment of fragmentary and broken images. Which continues from his poetry of early period to that of later period, the image of "a broken oar" in the line "you'll reach the edge of heaven." "The old house leans on the north wind" presents a traditional Chinese image, "the north wind", which signifies strong and uncontrollable forces of nature and corresponds to the analysis of Allen Ginsberg. On the employment of traditional Chinese images of Bei Dao's poetry, the aim of which is to construct an intimate and personal setting, while "the house" here may refer to the past and tradition of the poet, which is precarious under the force of the "the north wind", the mixture of these two images creates a sense of invulnerability. In the line "The winding road passes through the mountain pass/Even now someone is dreaming that dream", the image of "winding road" may refer to a difficult journey in search of something uncertain at the superficial level. Moreover, it may further symbolize the political and personal predicaments the poet has experienced during his life, while "dream" is a recurrent motif in Bei Dao's poetry, it may have different connotations in different poems, however, the "dream" here may refer to the memory of the past. In the first line of the final stanza, "I'm waiting for you at the sky's edge,/ for the sound of a stammered promise". "A stammered promise" in the second line here may denote an unreliable and dubious feeling. The process of the "moon" which will become full in the future refers to a natural cycle of the universe. The waning moon or the imperfect moon corresponds to the "the wound" in the following line, which is also in the process of becoming better, "healing". The coexistence of despair and hope, destruction and reconstruction is a major motif which can be found in most of Bei Dao's poetry, another such imagery can be seen in the line. According to Michelle Yeh (1991), the employment of the imagery of the cosmos in Bei Dao's poetry is not only used to symbolize those vast and unknown things but also as a way to transcend the boundaries of time, space, nation, and culture.

In summary, the poetry of Bei Dao in later period retains the tone of existential and philosophical, moreover, it takes on a universal tone which allows his voice to transcend the national and cultural boundaries.

After the analysis of the poetry of Bei Dao in three different periods, we can see the poetic tension of his

poetry is mainly created by the coexistence of despair and hope, destruction and reconstruction. Moreover, the atmosphere of despair and destruction is always created in the initial and middle part of the poetry, whereas a glimmer of hope and reconstruction can always be seen in the final stanza of his poetry. In his mid and later periods through the most representative poems published in these periods. The mid-period (from the 1980s to the 1990s) corresponds to the juncture when he was in the first years of exile, this phase also corresponds to the initial stage of "Jin Jiang Dai Hu" when different cultures like rivers "collide" with each other. While in the later period (from the 1990s to the 2000s), the poetry of Bei Dao matured on the one hand, and years of cultural negotiation and adaptation on the other, his poetry gradually takes on a universal and global perspective, meaning he perceives things not from the standpoint of any countries.

In his later period, Bei Dao's poetry reaches maturity, shifting from overt political defiance to a reconciliatory, existential tone, grappling with universal themes such as time, memory, and identity in exile. His poems like **At the Sky's Edge** use fragmentary images and cosmic metaphors, creating a space where despair coexists with hope, and personal and philosophical reflections transcend cultural boundaries. This evolution showcases his journey from a national voice to a universally resonant perspective, embodying themes of resilience and self-discovery.

3. YANG LIAN'S POETIC DEVELOPMENT

Since both Yang Lian and Bei Dao went into exile in 1989, in this sense, his poetry can also be categorized into three periods, the early period (from the late 1970s to the early 1980s), the mid-period (from the late 1980s to the early 1990s), and the late period (from the late 1990s to present). By analyzing the three most representative poems published in these three periods, it is possible to track the poetic development of Yang Lian through the perspective of "Jin Jiang Dai Hu". That has enabled us to delve into this special diasporic community, since the poetry of Yang is always long and in the form of the poetry anthology, the study will mainly analyze the excerpts of his poetry.

3.1. *The Early Period (from the late 1980s to the early 1990s)*

As a renowned representative of Misty poetry, Yang Lian's poetry in this period naturally illustrates such characteristics as obscure and indirect expressions. According to Yang Xiaobin (2002),

although greatly influenced by Chinese traditional poetry, the early poetry of Yang Lian is remarkable for its subversive language and political discourse, the style of his language is marked by its ambiguity and obscurity, the aim of which is not only to evade official censorship but to reflect on the crisis of language in itself. The poem *Norlang* (1983) is a good case in point, the setting of the poem is Tibet, which is commonly seen as a remote and sacred place. The soul can be purified, however, there is also a sense of physical and spiritual isolation in the poem, the publication of this poem incurred fierce domestic criticisms, leading him to become a target of the 1989 Anti-Pollution Movement and go into exile afterwards, the language and the employment of imagery in this poem merit our special attention. The study will select some excerpts to analyze it.

In the line "the sea is screaming but no one can hear", Michelle Yeh (2003) interprets the "sea" as a metaphor for chaos and something unfathomable and deep. However, it may also refer to people, while "screaming" may refer to the voice of people, which is ignored, thus creating the "silence" as a recurring motif in Yang's poetry. Yeh (2003) further argues that "the sea" creates a liminal space where past and present, life and death interact with each other. The subversive images in the line "the stupa holds a skull, more beautiful than marble", the "stupa" is a typical Buddhist image, denoting the interconnection of life and death. Van Crevel points out that the reason Yang Lian resorts to Buddhism for comfort in his poetry lies in its theory of reincarnation, which may provide a way to transcend this temporal life. In the line "My shadow climbs the hills of the past,/ while my voice tries to find me in the wind." John Cayley (1996) notes there is a negotiation of the "fractured temporalities" going on in the poem, the "shadow" is often deemed as a soul in superstitious stories. His "voice" loses in the wind, the "wind" here in the second line may refer to some uncontrollable, fluid or transient forces. While the "voice" may refer to his sense of self, which becomes disintegrated under great forces, denoting the insurmountable divide between the past and the present. In the line "Norlang, my life a cup of sand, how could I forget?", the poet compares his life to "a cup of sand". Which may refer to something fragile and difficult to hold into your hands, as it will easily slip through your finger, like people's memory and lives.

In summary, after the analysis of the early period poetry of Yang Lian and Bei Dao, it is easy to see that unlike Bei Dao's declarative style of poetry before the exile. Yang's poetry begins to take on a philosophical and meditative tone even before his exile. Moreover,

this poem reflects some characteristics of his poetry in the early period, such as the interaction of personal memory and collective history. There were several difficulties in retaining the sense of self under the gigantic forces of history, and transient as well as fleeting quality of human existence.

Yang Lian's early poetry, particularly in **Norlang** (1983), features ambiguous language and subversive imagery, reflecting themes of chaos, spiritual isolation, and the fragility of human existence. His work blends personal memory with collective history, creating a meditative tone even before his exile. Unlike Bei Dao's direct style, Yang philosophically explores the crisis of language and selfhood under historical pressures.

3.2. *The Middle period (from the late 1980s to the early 1990s)*

After being forced to go into exile in 1989, the poetry of Yang Lian underwent a transition. Maghiel van Crevel (2017) notes that there is a "recalibration" in Yang's poetic vision, moreover, his poetry written in this period became more "philosophically rigorous". While Yang put more poetic emphasis on the theme of exile and use it as both a reflection of his status quo and human condition, in the meantime, van Crevel also claims that Yang acquired his poetic inspirations from Chinese traditional poetry but through the lens of modernism. Wendy Larson (1991) argues that Yang's poetry written in this period reflects "an intellectual homelessness" where his exilic experience allows him to reflect on the sense of self, identity, and displacement from personal as well as national perspective. The poem *Yi* encapsulates almost all the points mentioned above, the poem was composed before Yang's exile, but the composition continues through his early years of exile. Initially, the title "*Yi*" merits our special attention, the Chinese character of "*Yi*" is "一", which is an important Confucian and Daoist concept, denoting unity and oneness, however, the illusion of achieving "*Yi*" is disrupted and subverted by the fragmentary syntax and images of the poem. Karen Thornber (2009) argues that the exilic experience of the poet renders the Utopian desire to achieve unity impossible.

In the line "the night sky / a mirror smashed into countless pieces / cannot reflect / my face completely". It is easy to see the same employment of the celestial image "the night sky" as in the poetry of Bei Dao, which may refer to the gigantic universe. It is compared as a smashed "mirror", presenting a sense of disintegration, whereas the image of the mirror often refers to a reflection of self, denoting a sense of fractured self. A tension of remembering and

forgetting the past can also be found in the line "history's eyelids tremble/a forgotten tear/falling into the sea". The trembling "history's eyelids" may refer to the precarious state of the past, the "tears" here may refer to individual and collective grief under the historical context which is on the verge of being forgotten, in this sense, the "sea" here may refer to a space of oblivion. Michelle Yeh (2003) observes that there is a tension in this poem between the willingness to remember the past and the awareness of being too indulged in the memory is dangerous under such a historical context, in his poetry, Yang acknowledges "the complexities of historical consciousness". In the meantime, the theme of "exile" can also be found in the line "I have no country/no home/a wind that never returns". The image "wind" here may denote the state of "homelessness", in other words, the sense of belonging, self, and identity are all gone with the "wind". According to Timothy Wai Keung Chan (2012), the forced exilic experience disrupts the once balanced relationship between the poet and his homeland, but the inherent balance in the language, thus causing negotiation going on between the words, images, and cultures. Greatly influenced by traditional Chinese poetry and Western modernist poetry, there is a negotiation of these two elements going on in Yang's poetry, for example, in the line "the mountain/collapses into a question", the image of "mountain" signifies the quality of sublime, stable, and eternal, whereas. It is denoting a strong sense of uncertainty, which permeates the whole poem. According to Nick Admussen (2016), the employment of traditional Chinese imagery in Yang's poetry is not to express nostalgia, instead, the poet intends to challenge and subvert their role in strengthening the oppressive narratives under the traditional Chinese context.

In Yang Lian's middle or transitional period, the poem illustrates negotiations between the past and present, reflecting his struggle with identity formation. This phase aligns with the "Jin Jiang Dai Hu" movement, characterized by cultural negotiation and concession. Ultimately, it captures the complexities of identity amidst evolving cultural landscapes.

3.3. *The Late Period (From the Late 1990s to the Present)*

After years of exile, there is a notable poetic development in the late period poetry of Yang Lian, during this period, such themes as the sense of displacement, dislocation, alienation, and existential meditations still permeate his poetry, however, he

puts more poetic emphasis on memory, reflection on mortality, and reconstruction of and identity. Michelle Yeh (2003) claims that Yang's late period poetry is greatly engaged with "place", it is "a hybridized cultural space", where different voices in different eras, different traditions. The individual and collective consciousness, the past and the present interact, in the meantime, memories of his homeland and his exilic experiences intertwined, leading to "dual consciousness" in Yang's later period. Yang takes on the role of cultural cosmopolitan, who can easily and skilfully deal with the influence of traditional poetry from the perspective of modernism and post-modernism.

To better understand Yang's poetry of this period, the study will delve into one representative poem of this period, *Concentric Circles*, which encapsulates most points mentioned above. Yang's obsession with the theme of death permeates through his life, which can also be found in this poem. In the line "burial is the only real song/everything sings towards death/earth speaks, speaks forever/each pore carries an unknown cry". The ritual of "burial" here may not only refer to the burial of the dead, it may further refer to the burial of the past and identities. Michelle Yeh (2004) argues that the understanding of "burial" in Yang's poetry cannot be limited in its literal sense in that it may denote memory and regeneration after death. While "the only real song" may refer to the poet's self-perceived fact that death is the ultimate fate of "everything"; whereas "an unknown cry" may refer to some unspeakable histories. The dominant image of "Concentric Circles" can be found in the line "like concentric circles/the shadow of one day's dream/enters another day's dream/black winds tear apart the white bones of the sky". It is closely interwoven with the present, in other words, the past memory haunts the poet at the night. According to David Der-wei Wang (2011), the "black winds" here may refer to recurrent violence in history, which is hard to resist and disrupt the order of world, which is represented by the "white bones of the sky". Moreover, another poetic emphasis in Yang's poetry is the limitations of the language, it can also be found in the line "language crumbles in your hands/night spreads through your veins/blood turning cold with each sound". The crumbling of the "language" may refer to the poet's experimentation with language, claiming words are inept to express deep feelings. A sense of coldness and despair permeate the line "night spreads through your veins", leading the "blood" to turn "cold", in this sense, an image of death is created. Zhang Yibing (2015) notes that the

employment of fragmentary language in Yang's poetry is a way to subvert traditional linguistic and poetic expressions. The subversive use of traditional imagery in the poem also merits our attention. For example, in the line "the grave speaks/it's the womb of the world/time after time, opening its mouth/to give birth to nameless dust". the image of "grave" seems to take on the notion of regeneration, as the once traditionally perceived image of death is personified as "the womb of the world", however, the well-acknowledged image of life gives birth to "nameless dust", which is usually considered as the image of death, a subversive cycle seems to come into formation at this point. According to Maghiel van Creveld(2008), the "dust" is a recurring image in Yang's poetry, denoting the fleeting quality of human lives in the face of the gigantic historical and temporal forces, the subversive use of these images puts great emphasis on the transient and cyclical nature of life.

The metaphor of concentric circles in the poem symbolizes a cyclical pattern of death and regeneration, highlighting the poet's struggle to reconnect with the past while being trapped in the present. This reflects his personal trauma alongside collective historical memory. Ultimately, it encapsulates the complexities of exile and the tension between loss and return.

Liang Luo (2006) notices a sense of "spatial and temporal exile" in the poem, claiming that his poetic narrative is transnational, as it moves easily between different geographical locations and periods, thus transcending the temporal and spatial limits during his meditation on exile. David Der-Wei Wang (2011) claims this poem reflects that Yang's late period poetry is characterized by its defiance against the linear structure of time and history, instead, he transforms it into a "repeating cycles" which constantly haunt the individual.

4. THE COMPARISON BETWEEN BEI DAO AND YANG LIAN

Both the poets are concerned with the theme of exile in their poetry, since they have different exilic experiences. Their treatment of exile varies from each other, both Bei Dao and Yang Lian are Misty poets, their poetic works are characterized by their fragmentary and abstract imagery, but compared with Bei Dao, Yang's poetry illustrates existential inclination in his mythological and historical imagery even before he was forced to go into exile. On the theme of memory, Bei Dao's poetry is mainly concerned with the difficulty of connecting with memory by constructing such images as walls and

windows in his poetry. As for Yang, his memory is mostly invoked through images of burial, dust, death, and rebirth, which is based on Chinese tradition and mythology, moreover, in Bei Dao's and Yang's middle and late-period poetry, there is a shift from the once personal concern with memory to collective memory. The third space theory by Homi K. Bhabha presents the idea of an in-between cultural space where interactions between the colonizer and the colonized foster a dynamic process of negotiation, ultimately creating cultural hybridity. Today, the countries from the first world and the previous colonizers manipulate in the international and intercultural space by initiated by World Trade Organization (WTOC) Bhandari, Nagendra. (2022). During the Maoist era 1949–till 1976, Chinese education had two main objectives: to develop scientific and technological expertise as a driving force for national revitalization, and to function as a tool for political indoctrination. Compared with

Yang's poetry, Bei Dao's poetry is less spiritual, instead, its main poetic emphasis is on existential questions, he relies on such celestial images as the sky and sea to describe an individual's ineptness in fighting against the vast cosmos. The spirituality of Yang's poetry mainly lies in his concern with death and rebirth, in the meantime, he tries to transcend the boundaries between life and death in his poetry. In a word, the composition of their poetry in different periods corresponds to different phases of "Jin Jiang Dai Hu". Since they were under the influence of different cultures in their early and middle period, the initial interaction of these different cultures is like the clash of "rivers" in the "estuary". There will be repulsion, negotiation, and concession in the initial phase of the process, however, after years of exile, their poetry gradually takes on a universal perspective in their late period poetry, they manage to transcend the boundaries of culture and nation through their poetry.

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