

# The Salvation of Pessimistic Soul: The ideology of the Poetry by Ji Xian During His Living in Mainland China

ZHANG Wei

School of Marxism, Xuzhou Medical University, Xuzhou 221004, Jiangsu, P. R. China

email: zhangwei\_xueshu@163.com

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**Abstract:** During his living in mainland China, Ji Xuan underwent a period of “loss in construction”. His nine anthologies were the every embodiment of his ideology during this period: radical personality and gloomy living condition infused his mind with a strong touch of sentimentality; and his tenacity and special enlightenment about life also cultivated his spirit of modernism, apart from his bewilderment and melancholy.

## 1. Introduction

When asked when he started composing poetry, he always replied emotionally, “it started with the first love”. With a touch of humor, his answer is full of passion, symbolizing his control of the starting point of making poetry. From the large number of his poems, it is easy to get a glimpse of his ideology during this period. This delving also sheds light on his ideological and theoretical preparation for the revolution and modernization of Neo-poetry thereafter in Taiwan.

## 2. Pessimistic soul and gloomy tune

In 1934, Ji published his first anthology, *The Poetry of Yishi*, with his own money. Most of the poems were praise and meditation of the beauty of love, including *Hexastich I, II, III, IV* and *Patient with Hard Disease*. Most poems were portrait of soul and expression of personality. His idea was opposite to the Left literature, and was sophisticated with a wide range of subjects. The beauty of nature, the nostalgia for homeland, the meditation about life and death and the exposure of inner life were all raw materials for his composition. Above all, a lonely self was the prototype of his world of muse, or the lasting motif of his poetry. His early poem, *Four Short Lines*, said “Wish the wind brings me to the heaven, as your world leaves me lonely in the mountain. Wish the flowers blossom in your fence, as I shall sail out to find my settlement.” The lack of home and orientation for life was typical of the pessimism of young generation in the crossroad of the times. In *Nostalgia*, Ji cried with tears: “Make me home and I have been wandering for so long.” In the fantastic *Waddling on the Earth*, he tried to keep in touch with the lives on the other end of the Earth. Even in *Reflection*, he deprived himself of flesh and blood and fixed himself to the cross of Christ, “the phoenix peaching on the sycamore don’t share the interest of sparrows in counting morning and evening. I’d rather not sing or fly to eternity.” These poems shed light on his pessimistic soul and gloomy tune which reflect reality and implicitly embody certain mentality of the society and emotion of the times. Ji’s melancholy and cynicism were largely embedded in the western art. Most of Ji’s poems were sighs about the bleakness of life, the disillusioning dreams and the suppression of personality, with a hue of depression. In *Uninhabited Island*, Ji portrayed himself as “a very lonely uninhabited island”, crying to the “Heaven” and “Hell” and calling for angel or Saturn to comfort his melancholy. This image also reappeared in *News*, *Competitor*, *Comet*, *Thirty Generations*. As a result, when the Post-Romanticism was entwined with Symbolism and transformed into Modernism. The resulting mood of confusion pervaded the history of China, and to some extent, it restrained Ji’s ideology of defying tradition, seeking revolution and pursuing western humanities.

### **3. A soul and spirit transcending time and space**

However, “neither a poem or a poet can be of world without being of China.” [1] That means the depth and enchantment of masterpieces should be rooted in the national culture but never confined by it. Whether the departure from the East or the transference to the West should not be treated as the absolute standard. Masterpieces should be entwined with the externalization of artist’s personality and conflicts of artist’s soul. The essence of Ji’s ideology lied in this paradox. The poet took root in reality and disdain the world with condescension. However, despite his vexation, he never attempted to purify reality with the past, nor did he intended to delve into the “wilderness” of human existence with terrifying spirit. In *Wind Listener*, he said “Are you lost? A young wind listener. Just com back to vanity and you will take a nap, while I was comforted, listening to wind with no direction, enjoying a cup of tea and sitting in the attic waiting for a storm.”. From the robust life came a positive and fighting spirit, which embodied the modern soul and spirit transcending time and space. Other works also included *A city of Fire*, *Fire*, *the Will of the Sea*, *Today*, *a Song of a Madman*. The transcending soul and spirit empowered Ji’s poems to transcend “real world” and to enter “aesthetic world”, comforting and improve self in this atmosphere.

### **4. Ironic cynic teasing life with humor**

From Ji’s paradoxical ideology stems another feature: ironic cynic teasing life with humor to express his open spirit and magnificent emotion. It is a symbol of his further flexibility and sudden enlightenment about the essence of life, an extending of “aesthetic world” transformed from sufferings and the embodiment of the most significant value of Ji’s ideology. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche once advocated “starting from music” “radically understanding the pleasure caused by the destruction of individuality, pursuing the connection between individuals for further enhancement, even celebrating the reunion between the estranged, opposed, suppressed nature and her human children.” [2] Ji was not lost in the “music” pleasure advocated by Nietzsche, nor was he addicted to “A Happy Excursion” by Zhuang Zhou or the “King of Happiness” by Wang Guowei. Through self-mockery and cynicism, he submerged poems in reality and reflected on human beings from negative and positive perspective. *Seven and Six* was the most typical embodiment. In *the Mask*, Ji once swore “I will use the most acrid word to satirize and ridicule myself, to expose of weakness and to reveal my strength.” It was remarkably different from the tradition “plaintive irony” and the Western “playfulness”. It was the unique soul and spirit of Ji’s poetry, encompassing the special and passionate appeal to human civilization and society with open benevolence. In *the Fly*, he equated “me” with “fly” with ironic upending to expect the return and advocacy of human tolerance. *The Come of Exhaustion* mocked the outdated minds with exaggerated comedy to advocate the improvement of human mind in line with the time, which was the essence of life. *The Eye of Conspiracy* ridiculed man and the world with sensitivity and fantasy of play, which aimed to dig into the terror of modern man and to aspire to harmonious relationship without conspiracy. These poems possess a touch of Western modern “theatre of absurd” and “black humor”. [3] The in-depth reflection on absurdity and tragedy of human beings was an embodiment of the comedy of modern society without falling into the desperate nightmare of craziness, abnormality or morbidity.

### **5. Summary**

Poetry is entwined with love, and “First love ” symbolizes the beginning of love. A feature of Ji is that he was not only addicted to the fantasy of love to conform with the banality of tradition, nor was he embedded in love to make boastful praise. Instead, he took love as a tool to express the philosophy of life and to reveal his reflection on youth. The conflict between radical personality and weak national awareness was not rooted in “fantasy”, nor was “destruction” taken as the only salvation for soul. Instead, after tasting the bitterness of life, he developed a romantic imagination about universe and life. By depicting his own miserable conditions, he delved into the existence of life. This was typical of Ji’s should and spirit for his poetry. That means all his cynicism about the

world, about man and about himself derive from the dignity and purity of a guide to rejuvenate the beauty of human nature, to insist on the aspiration and reconstruction of human, to encourage man to challenge destiny, with a personality of aggressiveness and conquest.

### **References**

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