

# Spatial Substitution: Interpretation of Sergei Yesenin's Poetry by Hai Zi\*

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**Abstract**—The villages and native landscape appearing in Hai Zi's poetry reflect the spatial consciousness of the hometown in the process of his creation. In line with this, Sergei Yesenin has a similar expression in his poetry. By examining the similar life of both Hai Zi and Sergei Yesenin and the interpretation of their poetry, it can be found that a similar growth space provides a fundamental possibility for Hai Zi to understand Sergei Yesenin's poetry. At the same time, it also provides a basis for Hai Zi to create his own poems by learning and imitating the living space of Sergei Yesenin. But the biggest innovation of Hai Zi's poetry is that he uses his genius in creation, magically replaces and substitutes the psychological space, and understands and enlightens the development of life, so that his poetry can go far beyond Sergei Yesenin in space image. Therefore, in literary works, the awakening of spatial consciousness will promote the generation and spread of excellent literary works.

**Keywords**—Geo-poetics; literary geography; Spatial Substitution; Hai Zi (Zha Haisheng); Sergei Yesenin

## I. INTRODUCTION

*The Poet Yesenin* is a group of poems written by Hai Zi from February 1986 to May 1987. It consists of nine sections. Through the poems of *Birth*, *The Clouds of the Country*, *Maiden*, *The Poet Yesenin*, *Cornfield*, *Getting Drunk at Hometown*, *The Journey of Prodigal Son*, *Death*, Hai Zi tells about the relationships between hometown and homeland, love and lover, country and labor, drunkenness and singing, prodigal son and wandering, death and regeneration, genius and general public, creating a very diverse poetic space. Between the lines of poetry, Hai Zi seems to converse with Yesenin, conducting an interesting literary creation.

Of course, Hai Zi's love for Yesenin does not stop at this group of poems mentioned above. In his other poetry works,

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as for Yesenin's creative experience and poetry commentary, Hai Zi also has a lot of amazing and very pertinent opinions and suggestions. For example, in the tenth chapter of the long poem *Sun and Land*, Hai Zi's works *The Lost People...Wine and Poetics: An Outline*, also reveals his preferring to Yesenin. Relying on the poetry works of Hai Zi, this article analyzes the influence of Yesenin's works on the creation of Hai Zi, and the inheritance and breakthrough of Yesenin by Hai Zi in the space expression.

## II. SIMILAR LIFE EXPERIENCE: THE FUNDAMENTAL POSSIBILITY FOR HAI ZI TO UNDERSTAND YESENIN'S POETRY

In the process of growing up and poetry writing, Hai Zi and Yesenin had a lot in common. These similarities make Yesenin's poetry the learning object of Hai Zi. But at the same time, Hai Zi has written creatively. Especially in space creation and image selection, Hai Zi has opened up a new road of his own.

### A. Introduction of Poet Yesenin and His Works

Sergei Yesenin was born in a Russian peasant family in Kronstantinovo on 21st September, 1895. Yesenin began writing poetry at seventeen while working as a proof-reader in Moscow. Yesenin's first volume of poetry *Ritual for the Dead*, was published in 1916. He had a bad habit that he often got drunk. However, he has written a lot of excellent works, such as *Tavern Moscow* (1924), *Confessions of a Hooligan* (1924), *Desolate and Pale Moonlight* (1925) and *The Black Man* (1925). He hanged himself on 27th December, 1925, although he was one of Russia's most popular poets and many of his works were popular in the world.

### B. Introduction of Poet Hai Zi and His Works

Hai Zi (real name is Zha Haisheng) was born on March 25th, 1964, in a farmer's family in Anqing, Anhui province. He was admitted to Peking University when he was only fifteen years old. He began to learn the creation of poetry during the period in Peking University. He committed suicide in Shanhaiguan on March 26th, 1989 [1]. He has a

great talent and miraculous creativity on poetry creation. His famous poems include *Asian Copper*, *The Sun of Arles*, *The Four Sisters*, *To the Night*, *Facing the Sea with Spring Blossoms*, *Motherland*, or *Dream as a Horse*, *Spring · Ten Hai Zis*, and long poems and other works including *But Water*, *Water*, *Messiah*, *Six Mysterious Stories*, etc.

### C. Introduction of Hai Zi's Group Poems "The Poet Yesenin"

Hai Zi and Yesenin both have common childhood living in the countryside and then leaving their hometowns, so they have so much in common.

Between February 1986 and May 1987, Hai Zi completed the group poems *The Poet Yesenin*. In the second section, *The Clouds of the Country*, the sixth section, *Getting Drunk at Hometown*, and the seventh section, *The Journey of Prodigal Son*, the poet regards himself as Yesenin. When writing about Yesenin's life, the theme that poet will not die and poetry is eternal is evident. The hometown complex has become an important concern for poetry in the above three sections, especially the replacement of Yesenin's living space by the poet's own living space.

Here the author takes the second section of Hai Zi's poem *The Clouds of the Country* as an example to illustrate Hai Zi's understanding, imitation and interpretation of Yesenin's works:

"The cloud of the country, hometown

You two are a pair of children on the water.

The door of the cloud,

Please open for happy people

Open for happiness and for the sad eyes that have no place to hide on the hillside". [2]<sup>326</sup>

This section is about the cloud of hometown. The cloud of the poet's hometown may actually cross Asia and Europe. They all follow happy people. But at the end of the poem, the sad eyes that hide nowhere on the hillside reveals the wandering and melancholy mentality of the wanderers who have nothing to rely on outside. This section is also a good emotional preparation for the later narration of nostalgia.

### III. FARMERS AND PRODIGAL SON: IMITATION AND REPRODUCTION OF LIVING SPACE

Hometown and mother tongue are the inexhaustible source of author's creation. Local cultural elements include the cultural image, symbols and customs of the hometown, including local flavors and dialects, including local property conditions and customs, including local social morality and natural scenery. Proverbs, slangs, maxims and idioms in local dialects all constitute unique local folk languages. In the language of poetry, homeland has a strong sense of space.

"You are all my thoughts.

You are the nearest place to your hometown.

The closest place to glo

The closest place to the fetal chamber." [2]<sup>190</sup>

Hai Zi regards the place closest to glory and fetal chamber as the place closest to home, and thinks that home has taken all my thoughts, so the homeland in the poet's works is geometry with multiple spatial implications.

### A. Hai Zi's Admiration for Yesenin

In addition to the group poem *The Poet Yesenin*, Hai Zi also mentioned Yesenin many times in his works. Hai Zi said in his poem theory article *Poetics: An Outline* that human beings live around the primitive forces. Van Gogh, Dostoevsky, Shelley, Hanbo, Allan Poe, Holderlin, Yessenin, Crane, Malo, Kafka, the ideal tragic poet Schiller, the mad prophet Nietzsche, all live here. At the center of the primitive power, their dialogue, accusation and defense can all become literary works. [2]<sup>893</sup> It can be seen that the above writers have influenced the poet Hai Zi.

Hai Zi believed that in the process of creation, the best, noblest and most talented princes often died first. Hai Zi's line of princes can be listed in a long list: Shelley, Yesenin, Holderlin, Allan Poe, Marlowe, Hanbo, Crane, Dylan... Schiller even Pushkin. Hai Zi is convinced of this point [2]<sup>897</sup>. Their tragic struggle and lyricism are the most magnificent poems of human existence.

Their literary works are solemn and lyric, with a pure and talented smile in human nature. The flame of this smile has been extinguished by the hand of fate. Hai Zi once said that, even in a moment, he felt that some of the poems written by Snow Maot or Yesenin were his. Hai Zi has been integrated with the princes of these Lyric subjects, and now you are still King and my teacher. The literary temperament of the Oriental poets is pale and weak, and they think they are right. Therefore, Hai Zi believes that poetry creation should abandon the interest of literati and pay close attention to the existence of life itself. This is the road to new life of Chinese poetry.

### B. Hometown Is an Emotional Symbol

In Hai Zi's works, the motifs of "hometown" and "village" are poetry groups that occupy more space, such as *Village* (1984), *Village* (1986), *Seven Villages of the Big Dipper — to Ejina Girl Met by Chance* (1986), *Village of Nine Poems* (1987) and *Two Villages* (1987). There have been many images such as "hometown", "village" and many images derived from them, such as "wheat", "wheat land", "earth", "house" and "grain". [3] Hai Zi once said to Gu Cheng: "I love villages. Villages are quiet and harmonious, and people there are so simple"

In Hai Zi's *The Sun Messiah: Primitive Fragment Epic*, the poetry theory fragments of the section *Incarnating as Man*, includes the following words about poetry creation and poetry understanding, poetry and truth, poetry and art, which are different forms of literary and artistic expression, but poetry has a strange power, which can quickly create a poetic space.

In Hai Zi's *Poetics: An Outline*, the recognition of homeland and homeland is still stubborn and persistent: "The

king is the king. Stone is stone. Wine is wine. Home is still home. These are all primitive rough emotional life and expression" [2]<sup>891</sup>. Hometown is a simple concept, but also a primitive, rough and perceptual existence.

### C. *Hometown Is Unforgettable and Its Accent Is Hard to Change*

It is often said on various occasions that the marriage of Chinese peasants takes place less than 40 miles on average. In fact, limited by traffic conditions, most of the marriages of the ancient Chinese were like this. They completed their life course of life, old age, illness and death within ten miles and eight townships, whether they were farmers or other people. As far as ancient people's cognition is concerned, nine miles or eight villages can be regarded as its biggest geographical vision, because nine miles or eight villages belong to the living space and communication space naturally constructed by villagers. Hai Zi's *The Sun · Killing*, Act II, Scene 11 solidifies the concept of time and space through the special reference of scarecrow:

"I am a scarecrow"

I remember my hometown, I remember that town" [2]<sup>728</sup>

Scarecrow on the stage, only to express a relatively fixed sign in space, is the resistance of time static and stagnant and can have a number of memories and space scene designs. Hai Zi's poem, the fourth part of *To Mother*, *Snow* eulogizes poor but ardent homeland, dilapidated doors and dilapidated dreams. Because of mothers, poverty is also beautiful. The old homeland and the aged mother are the impression of every homeless traveler when he looks back. This impression is the decline of the rural homeland, the childhood that the wanderers can't go back to and the innocence they can't find anymore; but all of these need a space to brew and ferment, that is, homeland and home.

## IV. VILLAGES AND CITIES: REPLACEMENT AND SUBSTITUTION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SPACE

In his most famous poem, *Wheat Field*, Hai Zi recalls the scene when he was a child guarding the wheat farm and threshing wheat. It also reflects the call of his childhood psychological space and the local space to his writing. Hai Zi uses the metaphor of cloud gathering wings in his hometown to express the tired feelings of the wanderers: The wind and clouds of the countryside will sleep on my shoulders, and the rolling waves of wheat and the moonlight of the wheat farm at night will wash the edges of the sickle very quickly. On wheat waves, the big table of Heaven, wheat undoubtedly nurtures thousands of years of civilization and billions of people.

### A. *Creation of Hometown Space Scene*

In *The Oriental Mountains*, Hai Zi places the hills of his hometown on the whole continental shelf. While creating a grand narrative space, Hai Zi uses the small space of his hometown to fill the void under this grand background. The delta, continental shelf and Northern Plain are all large-scale geographical spaces, thus laying a grand narrative void.

However, in order to avoid being empty, the poet's writing skills are still home rivers and hills, which are perceptible and easy to resonate with. This kind of geographic space around the poet is easy for readers to carry out space substitution, thus creating a psychological space that they have known each other before.

The first two sections of Hai Zi's poem *Untitled* set up a space scene of the wheat farm in his hometown. The space objects associated with the wheat farm, such as human food and social intercourse, dreams and life, birth, old age and illness and death, became the carriers of poetry narration.

"Give me food.

Give me a wedding.

Give me stars and horses.

Give me a song.

Give me rest!" [2]<sup>99</sup>

The realistic space is only the barnyard of the hometown, while the space created by the text includes the barn and grain hoarding associated with grain, churches and ceremonies associated with weddings, endless vaults and battlefields associated with stars and horses, homes and concert halls associated with songs and souls. The expansion of time is closely related to the spatial factors contained in poetry itself. A person's birthday, which is used to represent the course of life, is likened to a captive of time. She is beautiful and tempting, but also cruel and tormented. The integration of time is sitting in the concrete space of his hometown's wheat threshing ground. On the one hand, it sounds very abrupt, but this metaphor of synaesthesia melts the contradiction between time and space into the text of poetry.

### B. *Poor and Ardent Homeland*

In the group poem *Spring*, Hai Zi's nostalgia for his homeland is bright and clear. He switches the gap and connection between childish dream space and real space when he grew up, and carefully depicted a figurative representative object, the red lame horse. When the poet judges whether it is his own village, his own roof or his own night, the evidence he uses is his inner recognition of the spatial image of his homeland, whether his homeland can cleanse his innocence and bring us back to the real and seemingly unreal space scene.

In the poem *Walking through the Ocean with White Tiger*, Hai Zi writes about his hometown and mother, facing life and death.

"Mothers leaning towards the sun

Walking across the ocean with a white tiger

The maid on the left is life.

The maid on the right is dead." [2]<sup>12</sup>

This poem was written in 1986, during Hai Zi's emotional entanglement. For a poem of homesickness, we can see the poet's spatial thinking, the old hall, the bedridden

sickbed, birth and death, as well as the forest and sea. This complex spatial image also reflects the poet's confused thinking system about space. Now, however, the space written in writing will be read by the reader one by one and no longer appear disorderly.

### C. The Dual Tearing of Urban and Rural Areas

In the sixth section of the poem *The Poet Yesenin: Getting Drunk at Hometown*, the night in the hometown of Hai Zi was drunk on the ground. The poet flies in the blue moonlight. A drunken poet calls the mountains brothers, water sisters, and woods lovers. The poet's foot is set on the way home and becomes the foot of the person I love. Hometown, is a beautiful name and also a beautiful poem.

The place where you get drunk and sleep is not necessarily home, because after drunkenness, the poet's affection returns to his homeland. The wheat fields in May and the roof of his homeland are all manifestations in the poet's eyes and mind after drunkenness, but his homeland is only a name, a beautiful poem. It is unrealistic to really return to his homeland, especially to the hometown of poetry. Hometown exists only in lines of poetry.

In his poem *Dawn and Dusk — Twice Dowries, Two Sisters*, Hai Zi wrote about the problem of urban-rural dual tearing.

"Those who betray their parents and their homes and love life

Why do you want to go with me?" [2]<sup>459</sup> Before leaving his homeland, the poet, on the one hand, will try to forget the old homeland because he is thinking of new life, and on the other hand, will use forgetting as a grand excuse to dilute the guilt of "betraying parents and homeland". But the poet himself knows running away brings nothing more than an irreparable road. Lovers finally live together. And the imagery of wheat and wheat, rivers and rivers also aims to affirm the blessings and attachments to the homeland. Because cities can break dreams and ideals, the wandering king will return to his hometown under the cover of night, and finally realize the long-cherished wish of falling leaves, returning to the roots.

## V. UNDERSTANDING AND ENLIGHTENMENT: ARCHITECTURE AND EXPANSION OF POETICS SPACE

Hai Zi's prose poem *South* is a mixture of time and space. In his poem, he recalls plausible childhood memories and some scenes that appear repeatedly in his mind. At the same time, he simulates the possibility of the future: "When I was 81 years old, I got a map of my hometown. It has intermittent curves pointing to the sky and the earth and seems to form a circle." [2]<sup>278</sup>

The map of the hometown is actually not in the hands. It is portrayed in the mind. Even if this map is burned to ashes, it is impossible to change the brand of hometown in the poet's mind. The poet's skill in reorganizing time and space is to construct concrete but illusory space through the sky and earth, rivers and alleys of his hometown, and to let time

stagnate through letters that were not opened decades ago, so there is enough time to slowly state the rheology of the space.

### A. Time and Space Hub of Hometown

*The Sea of July* shows Hai Zi's thoughts about his homeland. Just like every person who encounters setbacks in the process of urban life and seeks refuge in his homeland, Hai Zi's heart is infinitely opposed to the city, but for the sake of livelihood and the expectations of his parents and elders, Hai Zi can only stay in the city and look forward to the countryside. It seems that Hai Zi has left his hometown aside, however, actually, Hai Zi has not returned to his former hometown, or his hometown has actually left Hai Zi aside.

Hai Zi's *Bride* is very skillful in the use of time and space. It can be seen that the lyrics of his hometown are based on very specific images, such as the cabin of his hometown, the chopsticks for eating, a jar of clear water and other concrete objects closely related to life, and then elucidates the metaphor:

"Some flowers blossom on tall trees.

Some fruits are deep underground." [2]<sup>7</sup>

In the construction of the idea of homeland, Hai Zi uses three images of cabin, chopsticks and a vat of clear water to lock time in the old time and space in the old house, which brings readers into the atmosphere of homeland complex, thus having the smoke and fire of life. At the end of the poem, whether this month has come to an end or not, whether the door is opened or not, the flowers will be on the tall trees, and the fruits will be deep underground, which is equivalent to the time valve of this month and the space hub of opening the door, all flowing into useless existence, thus completing the decomposition of time and space.

### B. Poets Expelled from Their Homes

The seventh section of the group poem *Poet Yesenin, The journey of the prodigal son*: Far from home, poet is expelled from their homes. He can only go to pubs and cities. But he could never forget that he came from a peasant family. There is even a dream of being a young country teacher. Of course, Yesenin also graduated from Normal College, but they could not return to their home sky, nor let their hair be full of flowers in their hometown. After the first section *Getting Drunk at Hometown*, the poet begins to recall the journey of the prodigal son of Yesenin (in fact, it is also Hai Zi himself), which highlights the author's local complex and organically bonds the life course of the two poets. In fact, as far as the poet's mental journey of growth is concerned, Yesenin's life ended by hanging himself, while Hai Zi was lying on the rail tracks to seek death. They both returned to the same place by different routes and they both get lost and guide in the process of seeking spiritual homeland.

In the second part of the long poem "*But Water, Water*", Hai Zi writes about his hometown with the quality of epic poems. His hometown grows in the place where there is water and grows on the suffering river beach. The dead caves



remind people of the caves on the top of the mountain where the ancestors of mankind lived, while the villages have been placed on more emotions. The villages of different readers are different. Some villages have ceased to grow, and the permanent population has become scarce; while some of them still remain in the primitive state of the river terraces on the south or east of the plateau. Hometown grows where there is water, that is, the valley terraces of human origin. Water is the source of all things, the umbilical cord of the village, and also the mysterious force that pushes wanderers to shore in their hometown.

### C. Sequelae of Fleeing Home

Chapter 10 "The Lost One... Wine" of Hai Zi's long poem *The Sun and the Land*, begins with the quotation of Yesenin:

"Where are you, people who are lost?

Can our light illuminate your way?"

"Hometown and home are our only diseases.

The incurable disease.

Quickly leave home, the farther you run, the better!"[2]<sup>616</sup>

Home is a treasure house, for us to treasure mellow poetry, so everyone is unable to give up their homeland and homesickness is easy to become our only, incurable symptoms. "Quickly leave home, the farther you run, the better" shows that the closer you are approaching your hometown, the more timid you are. In the space created by language, you can have a great escape space.

Hai Zi's *Master of Ceremony of The Sun -Poetic Drama* has an inquiry from the depths of his soul:

"Living to this day.

I want to ask who lives in my life.

Who lives on my stars, my hometown?

Who lives around me, near me and on me? [3]<sup>774</sup>

In the attribute of space, the space I belong to has its own sharp edge. All those who invade this ideological space irreverently will be strictly prohibited. In this geographical space, the poet has absolute power to possess and restrict space.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In early 1989, Hai Zi returned to his hometown of Anhui Province. This trip to his hometown brought him a great sense of desolation. Hometown has become a place he can never return. In the space created by all poets, the gap between the realistic homeland and the literary homeland is vast. Some of the things you know will never be found again. He said, you have become a complete stranger in your hometown! Nishikawa said, "The shaping of Hai Zi's personality should have both innate and acquired factors. The so-called acquired factor naturally refers to its agricultural background. Hai Zi is the son of a peasant. He is

infatuated with soil. He is naturally sad about something that has died with the development of the times. Yesenin's poetry has influenced Hai Zi's creation, but Hai Zi has stepped on his own road of innovation, which makes Hai Zi's poetry more successful. In the construction of poetic space, Hai Zi undoubtedly has more gifted wisdom, which is also an important reason for his success.

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