



The Similarities and Differences of the Imagery of "Wine" in the Poetry of Li Bai and Abu Nuwas

Ruoxuan Chen

College of Foreign Languages and Literature, Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou, Gansu,
730070, China
chenruoxuanfai@163.com

Abstract. Poetic image is an artistic image created by the unique emotional activity of the creative subject, and it is the objective image that embodies subjective emotion. Grasping the unique literary images in poetry is a bridge to enter the poet's emotional world, and "wine" is one of the common images in poetry. The Tang Dynasty of China and the Abbasid Dynasty of Arabia were the heyday of wine culture and poetry. Under this background, a large number of drinking poems appeared in two regions, among which the works of Li Bai and Abu Nuwas are outstanding. As famous poets of the Golden Age, Li Bai and Abu Nuwas share many similarities in their poems. In this thesis, i will analyse the common image "wine" in the poems of the two poets, aiming to explore the psychology of the poets' creation and feel the poets' inner world more closely.

Keywords: Wine; Li Bai; Abu Nuwas.

1 Introduction

In China, wine was originally used for rituals, political ceremonies and banquets. Poets use wine to cheer up the expression of unrestrained feelings, or to drown their sorrows and express their frustration and grief. In the case of the poets who write about wine, poetry and wine have long been integrated in some way.

In the Tang Dynasty, when poetry was at its peak, many famous poets used the image of "wine" to express their delicate emotions such as joy, satisfaction, disillusionment and sorrow. The word "wine" is often found in the works of many poets, the most notable of which is Li Bai.

Li Bai, courtesy name Taibai, was a great romantic poet of the Tang Dynasty in China, was known as "the most individualistic and greatest romantic poet after Qu Yuan, and has the reputation of being a poetry Immortal."^[1] Li Bai's poems are diverse in subject matter, mainly romantic, ethereal and spontaneous, with more than 900 poems in existence, of which wine poems account for a large proportion. The first thing that comes to people's mind when they think of Li Bai is his elegant name of the Immortal of Wine or the Immortal of Poetry. In his poems, the image of "wine" appears frequently, once he has a sense of the outside world, he incorporated it into the

wine and into his own emotions, and create a specific mood to express his deepest hidden feelings.

Let us turn our attention to the culture of poetry and wine in the Arab region: there was a saying during the period of Jahiliyyah that said, "Wine is the flesh, music is the soul, and pleasure is the product of both."^[2] During the Jahiliyyah before the birth of Islam, the Arabs took pleasure in adultery, gambling and alcoholism.^[3] At that time, Arabs drank wine, including brandy imported from Howland and Lebanon, and date aldehyde, which was made by fermenting dates in water. The poets who write about wine appeared during this period, and there were some Arab poets whose compositions dealt with drinking, but no one has ever made the glorification of wine a special subject of poetry.

After the emergence of Islam, the prohibition of alcohol was gradually promoted, and the Arabs restrained themselves from drinking and celebrating wine in public. In the Abbasid period, the relationship between poetry and wine had changed again. During this period, the social situation is stable, the productivity is greatly improved, the Arabs are gradually affected by the external customs, constantly absorbing Babylon, Phoenicia, India, Persia, Greece, Rome's Long-established cultural essence, among them, the Persian culture was the most influential. Influenced by Persian culture, the society became more and more luxurious, the culture of extravagance and fun was widespread so that the ancient nomadic character trait of drinking has been re-explored, some poets began to drink and praise wine openly, thus reviving the poetry of wine, which was gradually developed under the pen of the poet of Persian descent, Abu Nuwas.

Abu Nuwas, one of the most outstanding poets of the Abbasid dynasty, who was known as the "leader of wine poems", left behind more than 13,000 lines of poetry in his lifetime, with twelve types of subjects including odes, satires, condemnations and elegies. his outstanding contribution lies in the fact that he explored and refined "singing about wine" as a specialised poetic subject.^[4] He left behind countless poems about wine throughout his life. At that time, people even attributed other people's poems about wine to him: "A great deal of lore has been concocted around his name, and people attribute to him the content of all the poems of unknown origin, in which he was well versed."^[5]

At this stage, scholars' research on the poems of the two poets mostly focuses on the artistic techniques, cultural background, and thematic and emotional perspectives, and the comparisons of the poetic imagery of wine focus on the commonalities, seldom touching on the differences between the two poets. Cross-cultural comparative research and exploration of the deep-seated commonalities and differences between the two poets' wine poems can help to understand and promote Sino-Arabic culture and literary heritage. Whether it was during the Tang Dynasty in China or during the Abbasid Dynasty in Arabia, many literati and writers depicted the image of "wine" in a strong and full-bodied tone. Through the depiction of wine, they created poems that were either passionate, bold, or subtle, all of which expressed a strong sense of self. In the poems of Li Bai and Abu Nuwas, wine has similar but not identical meanings.

2 The Similarities of the "Wine" in the Two Poets

2.1 Love Wine as One's Life

The two poets are passionate about wine more than anything else. For example, Li Bai used "My fur coat worth a thousand coins of gold. And my flower-dappled horse may be sold" to "buy good wine that we may drown the woe age-old."^[6] (*Invitation to Wine*), and Abu Nuwas said, "Once I am dead, bury me under the vine, and let the juice of the grapes soak my bones, I am afraid that I won't be able to savour the fine wine after my death." (*Bury me by the vine*). The fervour and love for wine can be said to be overflowing from the two poets.

Li Bai, who, instead of pouring a little wine and singing in a shallow voice, drank and sang like his arrogant character.^[7] In many of Li Bai's poems, he depicted his love with wine. When there is no one to accompany him, he said, "Amid the flowers, from a pot of wine. I drink alone beneath the bright moonshine, I raise my cup to invite the Moon who blends. Her light with my Shadow and we're three friends."^[6] (*Drinking alone under the moon*). Under the moon among the flowers, holding a jug of wine pouring their own wine, he raised the glass to drink with the moon.

Li Bai's love of wine, on the one hand, is due to personal experience, many scholars believe that Li Bai had exotic origins, in his blood, there is an uninhibited instinct for life. Coupled with the wealth of his family, his interests and talents were varied. On the other hand, it can not be separated from the relaxed social environment, during the Tang Dynasty, people were proud to be able to live this luxurious and lascivious life, which was a sign of the prosperity of the feudal era and a unique temperament of the prosperous era.

In the prosperous Abbasid Dynasty, the empire's economy was quite prosperous, with developed agriculture, industry and commerce. The Persian's extravagant life of pleasure and drinking habits soon attracted the attention of the Arab upper class, including princes and nobles, who were eager to try their hand at it, so that "drinking naturally became a prominent phenomenon in the extravagant life of the new civilisation of the Abbasids, and its habits spread to all parts of the Islamic world."^[5]

In such social environment and national cultural atmosphere, Abu Nuwas' obsession with wine seems to be innate. His addiction to wine is no less than Li Bai's, he loved wine so much that he even considered it an indispensable part of his life, as if only wine made his life meaningful. He chanted in his poem, "With wine at home, it is like the dawn in the darkness, and with wine on the night walk, it is like a signpost for a happy heart." He added, "In the moonlight I am intoxicated by wine, and my body and mind sway in joy. I drink wine bitterly until the morning, no matter what others say. Joy is my religion, and sorrow is left behind me. Let's drink until the wine is gone. Wine is a part of my life, and under its magic I am happy beyond measure. Never mind if I go overboard, I just want to drink in pain." Wine is the source of his happiness, he enjoys the extreme carnival of the wine banquet, he finds the feeling of truth and freedom in drunkenness, and he uses wine to express his pursuit of happiness, fantasy and poetic life.

2.2 The Spirit of Freedom and Resistance in Wine

Under the frequent cultural exchanges and the relatively free social state of the flourishing times, it became possible to promote the spirit of freedom. The description of freedom and unrestrained pleasure is filled with almost every wine poems of Li Bai and Abu Nuwas.

Li Bai was addicted to wine because indulgence in wine could break through the limitations of rituals and hierarchies, and through the short-lived intoxicating effect of spirituality, he could achieve some kind of equality.^[8] He wrote: "When hopes are won, oh! Drink your fill in high delight, And never leave your wine-cup empty in moonlight!"^[6] (*Invitation to Wine*).

Echoing as if from space, Abu Nuwas also used poetic language to declare his disdain for tradition: "Enjoy! Youth doesn't last forever. Drink from night to day!", and he said, "I love to listen to the sound of the bamboo and the strings, I love to drink from a coarse cup and a bowl, I throw aside the garments of piety and devote myself to progress to the abyss of behaviour". The poets do not hide the fact that they are living a life of luxury, extravagance and freedom, and they loudly urge the world to join them in their enjoyment.

Abu Nuwas, who loved freedom by nature, acted spontaneously, did not care about his own words or his actions, advocated national equality, mercilessly ridiculed and despised the way of thinking of Arab nomads, and was full of enthusiasm and love for the rich and unfettered free life. At the time, the taboo against alcohol was mainly religious, and he subverted it in a mocking tone, declaring his contempt for tradition in poetic language: "I will drink unrestrainedly, even if it is prohibited, as I have always refused to abide by the rules." He was also able to reconcile religion with pleasure: "Put the wine bags aside and the verses from the Qur 'an together. Drink three glasses of wine and read a few verses." From this point of view, the poet obviously has a debauched and cynical personality, and behind this appearance, there is also a rebellious soul, which hides contempt for traditional ideas, resistance to religious asceticism, and praise for free personality. The poet expresses his feelings in the wine poetry and fully reveals his dissatisfaction with religion and his tendency towards secularism.

Li Bai also cherished freedom, and employed the pen as a weapon to convey his inner indignation. Despite living in prosperous times, the feudal society regarded the interests of the ruling class as its fundamental interests, inevitably causing psychological and spiritual harm to the people. In the eyes of the emperor, Li Bai, who was brimming with talent and erudition, could merely be an insignificant scholar who added amusement to the court of singing and dancing. The poet could only find relief from wine, and his sincere words and complaints after drinking were merely struggles and dissatisfaction with the rulers.

It can be seen that wine is not just an object that makes poets' mind wander, but also a tool for them to express their subjective emotions and find a spiritual support. The two poets express their demands for freedom and personality liberation in their songs about wine, which, from a certain point of view, is also a revolt and disdain for the present world's unfreedom and irrational systems and phenomena.

3 The Differences of the "Wine" in the Two Poets

3.1 Farewell in the Wine Poems of Li Bai

Drinking wine to send off friends is a universal custom with a long history and widely spread. In the imagery of ancient Chinese Farewell Poetry, wine is regarded by poets as a kind of lyrical and thoughtful medium for expressing their feelings and thoughts, which is more eye-catching. At the feast, the friends not only shared good memories, but also looked forward to the future, the sorrow and sincere blessings were left on the banquet, and the poets poured all their parting feelings into the wine, which was mixed with the joy of drinking and the sorrow of parting.

As a symbol of farewell, wine occupies an important position in Li Bai's wine poems. For example, Li Bai wrote: "The tavern's sweetened when wind blows in willow-down; A southern maiden urges guests to taste her wine. My dear young friends have come to see me leave the town; They who stay drink their cups and I who leave drink mine, ask the river flowing to the east, I pray, Whether its parting grief or mine will longer stay!"^[6] (*Parting at a tavern in JinLing*).

There is also a poem written to Du Fu: "Before we part we've drunk for many days. And visited all the scenic spots and ways. When at the Stone Gate shall we meet and drain. Our brimming golden cups of wine again?"^[6] (*Farewell to Du Fu at Stone Gate*). The poet wants to drink a drunkenness, he borrows the power of wine to dilute the inner sorrow of separation.

3.2 Love in the Wine Poems of Abu Nuwas

In classical Persian poetry, the depiction of "wine" is often accompanied by the beautiful maid at whose side the poets drank, it reflects one of the most common meanings of "wine" in Persian poetry and wine culture, namely, that it is closely related to love.

Love often appears metaphorically or indirectly in Abu Nuwas's wine poems. For example, he writes: "Don't cry for Leyla, don't grieve for Almond, the wine in my hand is red as a rose, and I'll drink a glass to the rose! A glass of wine poured down my throat, my eyes and cheeks flushed with red. The wine is like a ruby, the cup is like a pearl, and the fair lady in front of me is in her hand. A glass of wine in the hand and a glass of wine in the eye, can't make people drunk again and again. I am drunk in the same seat, who can understand this flavour!" He also wrote: "If it's wine, let's make it clear, and let me drink to my heart's content! Don't let me drink in secret, if I can be open. Life is one drunken night after another, and the only way to get away with it is to have long drunken years. When I'm sober, I'm always down and out, but when I'm drunk, I'm lucky and rich. I'm bold enough to name my favourite, how can I hide my joy and happiness? I'm not immune to debauchery when I'm looking for fun, and I can't be happy when I'm following the rules. What drunkard is not like the new moon in the sky, surrounded by beautiful women like stars shining brightly." His wine poems intertwine the emotional experiences of love and drinking, and together they express the poet's perception and pursuit of life, emotions and the meaning of life.

4 Conclusion

Although Li Bai and Abu Nuwas lived in different cultural environments and times, their wine poems reflect the same love for wine, the yearning for freedom, and the rebellion against the constraints of tradition. In his poems, Li Bai often swallows and drinks with a bold and unrestrained attitude, comparing wine to the source of happiness in life, he pursues the freedom of the soul in the intoxication of wine, and is dissatisfied with the shackles of the world; Scenes of drunkenness are also frequent in Abu Nuwas's poetry, where he likens wine to a symbol of freedom, a means of his pursuit of pleasure and indulgence, and challenges traditional authorities and norms through drinking, showing the pursuit of personal freedom and independence.

Admittedly, there are some differences in the imagery of wine in the two poems. Li Bai's wine poems often depict the feelings of separation, linking wine with parting and loneliness, expressing feelings about the vicissitudes of life and thoughts about the departure of close friends. Abu Nuwas's poems sometimes involve elements of love, combining wine with love and joy to express the yearning for happiness and romance.

In the poems of Li Bai and Abu Nuwas, wine has similar but not identical meanings. Their poems are not only expressions of personal emotions and attitudes towards life, but also reflect the characteristics of the society and culture of the time, and have become an indispensable and precious heritage in the literary world.

References

1. Hang, M. (2022) A Preliminary Comparison between Li Bai and the Arab Poet Mutainabi. *The History of the Chinese Literature*, (05): 25-27. DOI: 10. 20024/ j. cnki. cn42- 1911/ i.2022.05.008.
2. Amin, A. (2019) *A History of Arab-Islamic Culture*. The Commercial Press, Beijing.
3. Hitti, P.K. (1976) *A General History of Arabia*. The Commercial Press, Beijing.
4. Xiangyuan, W. (1994) *A general theory of the history of oriental literature*. Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, Shanghai.
5. Fakhouri, H. (1990) *History of Arabic literature*. People's Literature Publishing House, Beijing.
6. Yuanchong, X. (2021) *Selected Poems of Li Bai Translated by Xu Yuanchong*. Zhongyi Publishing House, Beijing.
7. Songliu, C. Biyun, Z. (2022) On the Tragic Consciousness in Li Bai's "Wine". *Journal of Changsha University of Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 37(01): 114-119. DOI: 10.16573/j.cnki.1672-934x.2022.01.014.
8. Daiqun, M. (2020) Consciousness of equality in Li Bai's poems about wine. *Journal of Ningbo Radio and Television University*, 18(02): 20-23. Doi: 10. 3969/ j. issn. 1672 -3724. 2020.02.005.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

