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The Dual Dialogue between Yuelu Xiangjiang and *Songs of Innocence*

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Abstract

This paper, based on the angle of Yuelu Mountain and Xiangjiang River landscape, offers a cross-cultural demonstration of the binary dimensions in *Songs of Innocence*. When expounded through the lens of Oriental "landscape dialectics," the "innocence" in Blake's poetry, is a revealation of characteristics of mutual dependence and evolution. The traditions of "pragmatic political governance" and "spiritual self-cultivation" from Yuelu Mountain provide a new insight for appreciation of the dialectical relationship between social critique and moral awareness in the poems; while the philosophical facet of the Xiangjiang River—"ceaseless flow and unending generation"—manifests the vivid logic through which the natural imagery in the poems transforms from fixed exposition to cyclical shift. Thus, the profound dialogue embedded in Blake's poetic system and Eastern wisdom has reached the harmony at the ultimate level of "unity of opposites," offering a new paradigm for cross-cultural poetics.

Keywords

***Songs of Innocence*; Mountain and River; landscape dialectics.**

1. Introduction: Poetic Dialogue from the Perspective of Cultural Geography

Blake's *Songs of Innocence*[1] has long been a heated discussion. However, the previous sholar interests have mainly centered on theology, ethics, and racial issues, leaving immense space for exploration from a humanistic poetic angle. Therefore, with the juxtoposition of the unique spatial culture of Yuelu Mountain and Xiangjiang River landscape, a new interpretation of this poetic subject naturally emerges. Integrating Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, Yuelu Mountain has been paid visit by myriads of literati throughout history. The Xiangjiang River is an embodiment of millennia of cultural heritage, and its ceaseless day-and-night flow is incessant incorporation of the philosophical essence of the *Book of Changes* (Yijing). That naturally brains about a "humanity–nature" dialog that coincidentally aligns with the "innocence–experience" dialogue in the poetry. By adopting an interpretive thread of "landscape dialectics" and the dialectic between society and nature to expound the poetic elements that are both oppositional and unified, this paper attempts to transcend the stereotypical East–West binary opposition with the aim to initiate an insightful dialogue and cross-cultural interpretation between Eastern and Western wisdoms.

2. The Yuelu Mountain Magnitude: The Innocent Dialectics Inherent in the Humanistic Spirit

A tripartite dialectical dimension for appreciating *Songs of Innocence* is the result of the unique humanistic scenery of Yuelu Mountain.

ISSN: 2688-8653

2.1. The Dialectic between Moral Innocence and Experiential Self-Consciousness

This dialectic reveals itself as the path of human nature's inspiration from its original state to its advanced development. Based on Yuelu Neo-Confucianism, this "innocence" is near Wang Yangming's concept of the "original conscience": "Knowledge is essence of the mind; the mind has the naturally-knowing capability [2]." If one strives to exterminate material desires, as *Daodejing* expounds, "return to the innocent state of infancy[3]," then pursuing one's spitirual purity, inevitably emerge will the innate intuition, endowing one with the ability to gradually perceive and distinguish the language of all beings. That echoes the Huxiang School's tenet "unity of knowledge and action," i.e., it is only through practice that a priori conscience must be fully fulfilled. The Huxiang School's fucus on "realistic implementation" and "practical learning" resonates with the idyllic imagery in the poems: In the process of interacting with the universe, one must incessantly purify one's spirit so to achieve the state that the inner light of heart might gradually appear crystal clear, endowing one with the ability to understand the language of all things in heaven and earth. The seasonal farming along the Xiangjiang's banks and the meditations of Neo-Confucianists may testify the same wisdom—that one must maintain that original empathy which "naturally feels compassion upon seeing a child about to fall into a well," and yet must also, among the vicissitudes of life, make this into a genuine and realistic state of life.

In "The Shepherd[1]," the shepherd's "sweet lot" and the "lambs' innocent call" are actually natural, but are not purely natural; instead, they reach a transcendental moral glory. The harmonious communication between the human and the lamb is a impeccalbe embodiment of an flawless unity between heaven and humanity. If distanced from the outside world, the shepherd's "innocence," would become emaningless. Only by caring for the sheep does his luminosity is unfold, which testifies his sincere moral cognition and social obligation. From a wider metaphical perspective, this transformation from innocence to self-consciousness manifests both individual cultivation and the advancement of civilization. Initiating from an original state of harmony, human beings have undergone the complicated process of knowledge, industrialization, and institutions, and eventually returns at a advanced level to a self-conscious harmony of "all things belonging to the same oneness." The utopian world in the poem is just a spiritual symbol of this return, which is not regression, but a re-establishment of relations between humanity and all the other things through the dual self-consciousness of morality and rationality. Therefore, the pastoral scene in "The Shepherd" is not simply a static ethical landscape but a dynamic allegory of refinement: innocence retains the beginning spot and the ultimate destination; experience is both the negation of innocence and its reincarnation.

2.2. The Dialectic between Historical Heaviness and Everlasting Present

The accountable stelae on Yuelu Mountain demonstrate historical ups and downs with its profound history offering a different angle for appreciating the philosophy of time in *Songs of Innocence*. Through the still-extant inscriptions, presented are the stories of happiness, sorrow, and anxiety before modern viewers in all their variety. One might wonder whether it is the ancient tablets speaking through the present, or modern humans tracing antiquity through these tablets which have linked together the millennia of historical context. For thousands of years, history is the present, and vice versa. Does this not align with the poetic line, "In one flower, a whole world; in one leaf, a whole heaven"? The cultural accumulation of Yuelu Mountain has profoundly proved this tension between eternity and history: each stele justifies a particular historical spot, yet the paramout cultural spirit transcends time. The inscriptions on those tablets, transcending hundreds of years, connect thousands-of-years' civilization in one place, merging and interpenetrating "history" and "present" at the moment of sightful

ISSN: 2688-8653

encounter. This faultlessly echoes Eastern wisdom: an instant manifests eternity, and a single thing echoes the whole.

The communication between weighty history and the present aligns with the poetic lines of *Songs of Innocence*. The "sweet lot" of the shepherd boy may ostensibly seem to transcend time, whereas he is ineluctably in the historical currents of Britain at that time. The seemingly immortal idyllic scene in the poem is actually a grain in the midst of social unrest. This contradiction between the macro and the micro justifies a stark contrast within the poem, carrying the imprint of the people, sentiments, and backdrops of its time. However, through uninterrupted expanation and dialogue, this whole humanistic spirit remains vibrant, transcending times. Therefore, true "heaviness" does not lie in accumulating past events but in rendering history a inexhaustble spring for the present. True "innocence" is not an avoidance of the past; but, after perceiving the tides of the era, still choosing to safeguard the permanent spirituality of human nature with poetry and purity.

2.3. The Dialectic between Individual Lyricism and Collective Concern

The ideal of harmony between personal cultivation and collective order has been reflected through those plaques in the Yuelu Academy's lecture. Each distinctive plaque perpetually propagates moral sentiment. Ranging from bold and unrestrained to restrained and elegant, their calligraphic styles represent unique individualities in the river of history. Yet each unique individual plaque, through the traces of its inscription, promotes certain ideals from its own perspective, embodying the principle that profound truth is found in the minute. And these theories, transmitted through the plaques to the present, connect the past, present, and future... Viewed as a whole, the many plaques of varied individuality, while each vies for distinction, coexist in solemn harmony, achieving a high unity of humanistic philosophy. The intellectual core of the plaques reflects Confucian virtues—universal love, reverence for life, and harmony. As a typical representative of Huxiang culture, Yuelu Academy's plaque bearing the inscription "Orthodox Lineage of the Dao" highlights its orthodox status, nurturing a spiritual ethos of "simplicity and righteousness," "pragmatic statecraft," and "unremitting self-improvement." These Confucian spiritual cores align with the concept of harmony embedded in *Songs of Innocence*: "in the human mind, there being the inner harmony of subject-object relations , harmony among people, and harmony between humanity and nature[4]."

In *Songs of Innocence*, the dialectical relationship between the individual and the universal, the finite and the infinite, is subtly presented through its unique symbolic system and childlike perspective. This dialectic is specifically exemplified in "Infant Joy." By employing a first-person infant voice "I," the poem shows an intensely personal, evanescent life experience: a newborn's most paramout, untainted fixation of its joy. Not referring to a particular "I" but adopting the generic "Infant" is just the prominent feature of Blake's poetics: the "I" in the poem is not only a particular proclaimor and an archetype—a representative for each "innocent" soul newly born into the world. Specific felicity thus desolves into a panoramic collective essence. Hence realized is the integration of the "small self" and the "great self": the extreme particular experience justifies the utmost boundless truth. This dialectical relation is still related to Blake's own mystical spiritual thoughts. In the state of "innocence," he deemd, ahead of the soul’s being rotten by the world of "experience," the soul can promptly perceive and integrate into cosmic energy. The baby's pleasure, thus, is not merely a spiritual passion but an ontological achievement—an indication of the congenial resonance between the microcosmic spirit and the macrocosmic world (the "great self"). The small self, when fully living out the panoramic essence of purity and pleasure (the "great self"), becomes itself a curing strengh and a silent exemplar. The dialectical synthesis of the micro- and the macro-world, the congruous tune of the "small self" and "great self," is once again impeccably analyzed here.

ISSN: 2688-8653

3. The Xiangjiang River Dimension: The Flow of Imagery in Natural Philosophy

As a symbol of natural features, The Xiangjiang River provides a threefold display for the imagery system of *Songs of Innocence*.

3.1. The Dissolution of the Opposition between Flowing and Static Imagery

A natural deconstruction of static dualism is just the everlasting running of the Xiangjiang River. From the Daoist perspective, "The highest good is like water; water benefits all things without contending[3]." The history of the Chinese nation is, in essence, a history of water management—governing water for the supreme good. From Da Yu's the Great taming of the floods, to the Dujiangyan irrigation system, to the Grand Canal, to the contemporary South-to-North Water Diversion Project—all are instances of water management aimed at harmonizing nature and society. Water is a crucial element both in the microcosm of the human body and the macrocosm of the Earth. The life-giving element of water also occupies an important place in the Five Elements. The perpetual flow and meandering curves of the Xiangjiang River echo the primitive diagram of Chinese philosophy—the curvilinear dynamism of the Taiji diagram. The Xiangjiang sometimes surges violently, sometimes lies calm, yet it is always rising and evaporating. Rising as clouds, the clouds turn to rain, which then nourishes the earth again. Does this ebb and flow not resemble a living Taiji diagram played out by nature? Does it not dissolve the opposition between flowing and static imagery? The dynamic Xiangjiang and the silent land appear mutually opposed, yet on a macro level they merge into one, and the opposition o f their imagery dissolves within the Taiji.

The water imagery is indeed an embodiment of the "Dao." It can laugh in innocence or sob in experience, but in essence it is different manifestations of the same life force. In *Songs of Innocence,* many images of streams and springs dissolve bipolar oppositions in a mild yet stupendous way. First and foremost, these streams and springs represent the innocent, spontaneous, and infinite formative power of life itself. They move down uniterrupted, quite naturally, just like the unceasing state of the human psychology. Furthermore, the physical water itself are gifted with transcendental ideas. Wateris so flexible and its form can be varied; sometimes it can be solid, other times it can be liquid, or gaseous, yet its essence, wet, nourishing, and moving feature remains consistent. This is a metaphor for the essence of ingenuousness which is not a rigid, immature state, but an inner psychological quality of flexible changability and resilience. The outworld environment and cirrumstances may change incessantly; a person may tranform from immaturity into maturity, experiencing numerous vicissitudes, yet that quintessential creativity (the "water-nature") never disappears. This is probably the insightful wisdom expounded by Blake through the eyes of babies and the gushing waters: the eventual truth of life lies not in condensation and calm, but in the endess ingenuity and ebb itself, just like a forever-moving spring.

3.2. The Dialogue between Cyclical Time and Linear Narrative

This is the conversation that towers culture and natural philosophy. A incessant experience of cyclical time is fromed through the seasonal cycles and tidal rhythms of the Xiangjiang basin: floods in spring and ebbs in autumn, the alternation of dawn and dusk —all is upgraded in return. This philosophy of time is essentially a dialectic between vivid completeness and cyclical shift. Each moment is both a miniature of the cosmos and a connection in the permanent flow. The waters of Xiangjiang welcome floods in spring and carry away leaves in autumn, but the river is in perpetual flow. The cyclical sequence of the Xiangjiang is a narrative, and an epic without beginning or end: the rise and fall repeats rhythmically, yet embraces quite new sedimentation and erosion; in cycle returns each blossom, yet faces diversified times and tides, winds and rains. On the other hand, linear time is just like an arrow shooting toward an

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unfathomable cosmos, yet in the aspect of religious or Enlightenment, it is also endowed with explanations of redemption or advancement.

The poet is at the crossroads of the two: he depicts the linear travel of degradation and redemption; however, in imaging those shepherds and lambs, day after day, he exposes an imaginative cosmos of cyclical reproduction. The poet is grown up in a Western background ruled by linear time, yet imagery in his poems often diverts from the restraints of singular temporality, uncovering flashes of recurring thinking. In each part of the poem, those ostensibly immovable "moments of innocence" are essentially whole and autarky realm; yet simultaneously resemble seeds awaiting sprouting and quiet transformation. The babies and lambs represent not only initial purity but also the imcoming and ineluctable way of degradation and return. Each human being moves from childhood immaturity to sophistication; but deep within one's psyche, an everlasting "song of innocence" perpetually reverberates. Running in cycles, returning in one direction—this is both the dialectic of those poems and the secular ethic exposed jointly by nature and civilization.

3.3. The Dialectic between Clear Essence and Turbid Reality

Though the Xiangjiang river may oftentimes gush with soggy waves, its quintessential feature is clarity. Zhou Dunyi, a neo-confucianist in Northen Song Dynasty, writing by the Xiangjiang, composed "On the Love of the Lotus," praising the lotus for its quality not altered by the mud inwhich it is nurtured—a highly philosophical eulogy. This "transparent depth" is the loftiest state of Oriental aesthetics, as expounded by Qu Yuan, a patriotic political poet in the Warring States: "All the world is corruptible, I alone am upright; all are drunk, I alone am awake," leading him to commit suicide by drowning himself heroically into the Miluo River to prove his commitment to his motherland. Muddiness is not the ultimate goal of clarity, but a requied step of its deepening. By undergoing ambivalence, the soul realizes advanced wholeness; by gaining silt, the lake achieves the fertility to nurture life.

The spiritual purification in Blake's poetry, sustained even after knowing the impurity of cognition, still achieves the state of innocence. It is just within this dialectical framework that the recurrant imagery of "purification" in the poems must be appreciated. In the cosmos of Blake, clarity and turbidity shape a insightful dialectical pair. The water's "clear essence"is a suitable symbol of the the soul's initial state of "innocence"—pure, glassy, in candid conversation with the divine, as in the anonymous yet self-sufficient joy of baby pleasure. On the other hand, "Turbid reality," aligns with the interruption of the world of "experience": public norms, rational manacles, complexities of desires. Blake does not directly denouce clarity and turbidity as binary values. Just as water has to experience ups and downs, the maturity of the soul has to experience the spiritual cleansing of "experience." This dialectical relationship is a impeccable revelation of Blake's "advanced innocence"—an innocence no more of credulity untouched by the secular world, but of sagacity that remains purified after having experienced turbidity.

4. Conclusion: Rereading Innocence between Mountain and River

Re-appreciating *Songs of Innocence* from the angle of Yuelu Mountain and the Xiangjiang River is both a new rendering of the poems but a paradigm transformation in thinking. Rather than a state of childish nature, the Mountain reveals the spiritual arena of cultivating innocenc; while the River purports that oppositions are evanescent frames of flow, not the ultimate existential truth. When considered from the lens of Eastern landscape wisdom, the ostensibly binary concepts in the poetry expose a relationship of reciprocal interdependence, shift, and dialectical unity. If known Eastern wisdom, Blake might have entitled his poetry *The Mountain-and-River of Innocence and Experience*. For true poetic insight is like the landscape itself: maintaining both

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the the mountain's solidity and the liquid's fluidity; and at the same time rooted in precise civilization yet reaching toward boundless human interests.

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