

The Influence of Arthur Rimbaud on Dai Wang Shu and Nakahara Chūya's Poetry— The Construction of their Poetic Decadent World

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Abstract

This article argues both Dai Wang-shu (戴望舒, 1905–1950) and Nakahara Chūya (中原中也, 1907–1937), as readers of French symbolist Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891)'s poetry, adopted similar stylistic elements because the three of them were trapped in times of turbulence. Rimbaud experienced the decline of the Second French Empire and its collapse after the Franco–Prussian War in 1870. Nakahara was situated in a revolutionary age—the aftermath of the First World War, the world's economic depression and the rise of militarism in Japan—in which politics and rapid cultural change were causing most Japanese to have a crisis of identity; and similarly, Dai's literary life flourished as China was being invaded by Japanese armies. While western scholars such as Gregory Lee and Donald Keene have hitherto, respectively, considered the biographical accounts of Dai's poetry and hastened to label Nakahara as the “Japanese Rimbaud”, with at the same time Asian scholars in unison claiming the uniqueness of the two poets, few have addressed the issue of how a double identity—being both a poet and a translator—affects the stylistics of one's poetry. To this end this article uses close readings of some of Dai's poetry written during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, and Nakahara's *Collection of Goat Songs*, written in the 1920s, to argue further that the reason why they had to narrate and confess their sentiment in such a French symbolist way is closely related to their crises of humanity, culture, war and identity.

Keywords: crisis, decadence, Dai Wang-shu, Nakahara Chūya, world wars

Introduction

“In the world there are only three poets. Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue. How true it is! Only three,” wrote Nakahara (2003, p. 38) in his 1927 diary. In the same year, he also confessed in French, “Rimbaud is more romantic than Verlaine. It is the only difference between them” (ibid., p. 67). In other words, from his perspective, the three symbolist poets serve as his ideal French poets. But among the three, he appreciated Rimbaud the most, saying how he felt “good” (ibid., p. 70) when he read his poetry. Thus, viewed in this light, Noriko Thunman is inaccurate in clearly dividing Nakahara’s works into three periods—one of which, 1928–1933, was what she claimed to be his “Verlaine period” (1983, p. 2)—by neglecting the exalted status of Rimbaud in Nakahara’s mind. His veneration for Rimbaud is further evidenced in his reading and translating Rimbaud’s works, as indicated in his 1937 diary (Nakahara, 2003, pp. 182, 186, 187). Apparently, this matches how Keene (1983) remarked on him as “the Japanese Rimbaud ... in the role of a *poète maudit*” (p. 345), although it may be too hasty a conclusion since Keene ceased to compare each of their works in a biographical, historical and cultural context.

However, it is not only the Japanese translator-poet who admired Rimbaud; the talent of the French symbolist poet also attracted great attention in the Chinese literary world, among which the young poet Dai Wang-shu. When asked which French poet Dai was impressed with, he answered readily, in a letter from 1936, Rimbaud and his contemporary Lautréamont (1846–1870) (Lee, 1989, p. 48). Most scholars celebrated more the influence of Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) and Paul Verlaine (1844–1896) on Dai,¹ but many have overlooked the fact that Dai also translated into Chinese a number of Rimbaud’s prose poems, “Mystique” (Mystery 「神秘」), “Ornière” (Ruts 「車轍」), “Fleurs” (Flowers 「花」), “A une raison” (To a Reason 「致——理性」), “Aube” (Dawn 「黎明」) and “Guerre” (Wars 「戰爭」), which were published in the literary magazine *Wenyi zhoukan* (Literary Periodicals 『文藝週刊』) (Xiong, 2016) on 16th July 1944. Notably, Baudelaire and Rimbaud were introduced to China almost at the same time, the former through the Association for Literary Studies established in China in 1920 (Lee, 2012, pp. 509–513) and the latter in an article by Li Huang (1895–1991), where Rimbaud’s poems were first introduced to Chinese readers in 1921 (loc. cit.). Judging from

¹ For example, Tao’s (2009, pp. 211–224) thesis spends one whole section emphasizing the influence of Verlaine on Dai by comparing works of both; likewise Fang and Zhang’s (2015, pp. 189–194) article judged Baudelaire and Verlaine as strongly influential on Dai, since Dai had translated a lot of their poems into Chinese.

the above evidence, it can be believed that Rimbaud, especially his prose poetry, was inspirational in Dai's literary career.

Rather than completely mimicking the style of others, each poet, I argue, transforms it in response to the era and the society to which they belong. In the Chinese literary landscape of the 1920s and 30s, as Shih Shu-mei pointed out, Chinese writers, including Dai Wang-shu, were struggling between absorbing Western and Japanese culture, and “repudiating the humiliating presence of [such] *colonial* culture” (2001, p. 231; original emphasis). Likewise, Japanese poets were experimenting with different forms and styles of “modern verse” during the Taishō and early Shōwa period.² Translating French poems thus represents both Asian poets' attempt to seek ways to incorporate French culture into their own intrinsic literary culture, and to create a new form and style of writing.

“Asociability” as Rimbaud’s Reaction toward Tumult

To provide a common ground for comparison, I wish to first give a brief historical and cultural account of Rimbaud, Nakahara and Dai. The renowned French poet, born into a family with a military background in the mid-nineteenth century, was strictly disciplined by his mother during his childhood. Yet perhaps thanks to such a draconian upbringing, his talent as a child prodigy of poetry writing was exhibited in his academic performance and other awards he received while still in his teens (Ivry, 1998, pp. 11–21). His persistent mental discipline may have motivated behavior that “became outwardly provocative” (ibid., p. 22) from late October 1870, including stealing books and behaving rudely. Meyers (2011) commented that Rimbaud was a poet possessing a “fragmented self” (p. 178), by which he meant that Rimbaud encompasses both the character of rationality and irrationality since he comprehends “I is the other” (ibid., p. 172), which phrase Rimbaud used when writing to George Izambard to express a split self. However, from the new poetic style he adopted in his poetry, I would rather subscribe to the idea that Rimbaud decided to be more iconoclastic and to sever ties to mainstream poetry writing as he was forced by his mother to study traditional Greek and Latin. The construction of his poetic world was thus an attempt to conceal his perceptions of his community as well as the nation. For instance, in the poem “Paris War-Cry” he praised the bravery of French soldiers during the Franco-Prussian War. And even though

² For more about the clear distinctions among various types of modern verse, refer to Makoto Ōoka (1969).

later during his days with Verlaine from 1871 his works concentrated more on his abstract feelings, it was nevertheless his reaction towards the turbulent, ever-changing French political and social landscape as a consequence of the influence of Marx's Manifesto (Ross, 1988, pp. 21–23). As Kristin Ross remarked, “nothing is more social than Rimbaud's asociability” (ibid., p. 20), and his early eight-line poem “Sensation” (1870) did indeed echo his later life as a wanderer escaping from the unstable and eventually crumbling empire.

On blue evenings in summer, down paths,
 Spiked by sharp corn, I'll trample new grass.
 Dreaming, I'll feel the cool on my feet,
 The wind will bathe my bare head.
 I shan't speak, I'll clear out all my thoughts.
 But love without end shall fill my soul,
 And I'll travel far, very far, Nature's
 Vagabond—happy as with a woman. (Sorrell (trans.), 2009, pp. 10–11)

From “Sensation”, two major themes, as Ruff highlighted, are nature and childhood (1968, p. 28). Rimbaud idealizes how he accessed nature, including “trampl[ing] new grass” (line 2), “feel[ing] the cool on my feet” (line 3) and allowing “the wind [to] bath my bare head” (line 4) to escape from harsh reality. He uses the word “dreaming” (line 3; *rêveur*, literally “dreamer” in French) not only in this piece but also other early poetry such as “Sun and Skin,” “Ophelia” and “My Bohemia (Fantasy),” all written in 1870. However, words and expressions associated with “dream” (*rêve* as a noun and *rêver* as a verb in French) appeared frequently throughout his complete works. Through writing poems, he attempted to isolate himself from the community where he could enjoy “free liberty” (ibid., p. 29), the phrase he used in a letter to his revered teacher George Izambard. The word “liberty” (*liberté*) was laden with a French historical and cultural burden as it was one of the words used in the slogan of the 1789 French Revolution. Unfortunately, the French had not won any peace despite the continuous pursuit of liberty, since civil wars, rebellions, the Franco–Prussian War and the overthrowing of empire followed one after another (Doyle, 2001, pp. 90–92). With his experience of such political uncertainties in addition to his experience of a draconian childhood, it was thereby natural for him to think of leading a life as a “vagabond” (line 8), the original word for which

is *Bohémien*, with its connotation of wanderers in pursuit of like-minded company. In other words, instead of positively participating in society or radically protesting for his rights, he chose to be a social outcast to express his discontent toward everything.

Rimbaud's asociability indeed is sustained in his last set of poems, *Illuminations* (1872–1873), all of which were written in prose form. For instance, in “Aube” (Dawn), which Dai Wang-shu translated into Chinese, Rimbaud endeavored to construct a world of divine, natural peace in his mind. However, such peacefulness transforms from a level of lifelessness to a divine plane. The first two paragraphs of the poem declare:

I have been dawn's summer lord.
Utter stillness on the palace fronts. Lifeless water. The shadow-camps on the woodland road had not yet been struck. I walked awakening warm and living breaths, and the precious stones looked, and the wings lifted without a sound. (Sorrell (trans.), pp. 286–287)

The word “lifeless” (*morte*), as well as the silent atmosphere surrounding ‘I’ (*je*)—“shadow-camps”, “wings without a sound”—created what Gerry Macklin (2011) called “a sense of pre-dawn deadness” (p. 56), and, similar to “Sensation”, we can still see the image of him as a *Bohémien* from the clause “I walked awakening warm and living breaths.” Such indicates Rimbaud's desire to escape from reality and to seek changes through adventures. Viewed in this light, the pre-dawn deadness may imply a transition, or a channel whereby the poet himself can travel to a place with true tranquility—dawn. When dawn sets in, we can feel the happiness of “I,” as he mentions, in the middle, that “I laughed at the waterfall” (*Je ris au waterfall*), and that “I” engages “myself” in an intimate chase with the goddess. This happiness is nevertheless temporary. As though a song full of harmony suddenly clashes with an abrupt cadence, when “I” sees “the child fell ... in the depth of the wood, dawn,” all visions and images vanish in no time, and “I” ceases to describe anything during the period between dawn and noon.

[...] In the depths of the wood, dawn and the child fell.
On waking, it was noon. (loc. cit.)

Here we can see that “my” pursuit toward the ideal and dreams has now come to nothing and “I” must wake up and face reality. At a metaphorical level, all visions and imagery are lost in the last sentence: “On waking, it was noon.” Macklin (2011) shrewdly argues that this laconic

sentence is “as if the dream is over and we must now return to reality with the resulting disillusionment over the loss of transcendence being reflected” (p. 60). Unlike Rimbaud’s earlier poems, he wrote “Aube” and many others in the form of a tale, but as this tale also constitutes Rimbaud’s meanderings between reality and dreams, the temporal dimension of the story is extended and suppressed at will, to express his simultaneous desperate hope and helplessness as an individual to change society.

When Nakahara “Met” Rimbaud

Rimbaud’s “asociability,” to use Ross’s term, drew the empathy of Nakahara. In his translation manuscript, he wrote, “I feel so delighted when I know Arthur Rimbaud. ... Not even one day does my appreciation towards his talent and characters fade” (2000, p. 464, my translation). His encounter with Rimbaud was through his friend Tarō Tominaga, as he confessed in his 「詩的履歴書」 *Shitekirekisho* (Poetic Résumé) that he learnt about French poets in 1924, a year after learning of European Dadaist poetry via another Japanese poet, Shinkichi Takahashi (Nakahara, 2003, p. 184). In many aspects, Nakahara resembled Rimbaud. They matured rather early, Nakahara starting to create poems at the age of eight (Yoshida Hirō et al., 1981, p. 216) while Rimbaud started his poetic life in his mid-teens (Ruff, 1968, pp. 16–17); they both experienced a period of rebellion. Furthermore, in the case of Nakahara, when he was sixteen years old he was affected both by the Kantō earthquake of 1923 and his reading of Takahashi’s Dadaist poetry, and spent almost a year creating several Dada poems by himself. Take 「名詞の扱い」 “*Meishi no atsukaini*” (In the Treatment of Nouns) as an example:

My poems are
 Symbols which have forgotten logic
 In the treatment of nouns
 [...]
 When the Dadaist says “coffin”
 It’s a “coffin” that spans the ages
 That’s the everlastingness of dada
 But the dadaist doesn’t write the poetry of dada

Out of a longing for everlastingness. (Mackintosh and Sugiyama (trans.), 1993, p. 27)

Here we can see Nakahara is aiming at constructing his own poetic world by using “symbols” in an illogical way—which might signify that he intends to break with the traditional use of images and metaphors, and along with them the old poetic form. Structurally speaking, referring to the source text we find that the first three lines are not in the right grammatical order since they are, chronologically, “In the treatment of nouns”, “Symbols which have forgotten logic” and “My poems are”. Such a bold disruption of normal syntax could be explained by his youthful rebellion in pre-maturity, as he acknowledged in his diary entries about his ennui and the insipid life he had been leading from his early childhood (Nakahara, 2002, pp. 32–33), and therefore poetry was the only space where he could liberate himself and create without any constraints. Probably fascinated also by the revolutionary nature of Dada, Nakahara departed from ordinary diction to give terms new meaning, and this is reflected in his use of the symbol of the “coffin” as well. The long box image is normally associated with death and silence, but it is precedential for Nakahara to think of the alternately changing and eternal nature of the coffin since, on one hand, the shape, structure and patterns of it might change in different times and on the other hand the dead were always buried in it. Thunman (1983) argues that the poem shows signs of the end of his “dadaistic rebellion” (p. 27) and the beginning of this embrace of symbolism since, unlike Dadaism, which regards destruction as an end in itself, Nakahara took destruction as a means to the reconstruction of his world. Thus, his Dadaist-poetry creative period had as short a span as the European Dadaist movement. We can see, however, in his subsequent poems, that he still left traces of Dadaist writing style.

The third similarity that Rimbaud and Nakahara bear is their relatively short literary career. For the French poet, after the tragedy in which Verlaine shot and injured him he decided to rid himself of Verlaine. He wrote his unfinished collection *Illuminations* in 1874 and never wrote any other poetry, ending his pitifully short but brilliant literary life that had lasted for roughly half a decade (Ivry, 1998). The Japanese poet formally started his poetry writing in 1924, when he was seventeen; tuberculosis meningitis took his life in 1936 and ended his thirteen years of poetry writing (Yoshida Hirō et al., op. cit., pp. 379–407). Despite their relatively short literary careers, their respective sorrowful personal experiences always motivated them to write their poems. In the case of Nakahara, many of his works were completed out of his commemoration of his breakup with his girlfriend, and the death of his family, while

Rimbaud's painful experiences can also be felt in most of his works.

Nakahara's Asociability as an Anti-reaction

Considering the social, political and literary landscape, one can observe that Nakahara too belonged to turbulent times. As a poet experiencing the Taishō period in the 1920s and the early Showa period in the 1930s, Nakahara witnessed rapid changes in the Japanese state and society. As historical critic Garon (1994) rightly pointed out, the 1920s were a “time of conflict between a conservative state and a modernizing, urbanizing civil society” (p. 350), while the government was, in response to widespread discontent about living standards expressed, especially, by the middle class, began to implement “daily life improvement campaigns” (ibid., p. 356). But still, influenced by Western ideologies, socialist and proletarian movements were prevalent during that period (Duus & Scheiner, 1989, pp. 654–710). Even though Fundō (1974) commented that “Nakahara was neither a modernist, nor could his works be claimed as proletariat poetry but he pioneered in narrating his solitude frankly in his poems”, (p. 209), I question whether Fundō had put an equals sign, as it were, between modernism and westernization. Nevertheless, “modern” is always relative between the present and the past. Viewed in a literary aspect, it was unfair to negate entirely his modernist attempt by neglecting how Nakahara struggled and experimented with various styles of writing. Sasaki gave a historical background in his chapter to prove that the reform was rigorous yet uncertain as to whether to use poetry in written form or in oral form, and whether to use a fixed form of poetry or free verse (Sasaki et al., 2007, pp. 4–5). In Nakahara's case, he always employed a mixed mode in both his translations of Rimbaud's poetry and his own creative writing. Take his translation of Rimbaud's “Happiness” (*Bonheur*) as an example:

O seasons, o chateaux ...
 Which soul has no flaws?
 O seasons, o chateaux,
 I've made the magic study
 Of Happiness, no one evades. [...] (Sorrell (trans.), pp. 194–195)³

³ The original poem reads “Ô saisons, ô châteaux / Quelle âme est sans défauts? / Ô saisons, ô châteaux, / J'ai

Originally, Rimbaud unhesitatingly and unselfconsciously extolled the beauty of seasons and castles, and practiced his free power in the poetic world where “I” can create happiness by oneself. However, the spontaneous release is lost in sacrifice to his clinging to Japanese poetry’s musicality:

toki ga nagareru oshiro ga mieru
mukizuna mono nazo doko ni arau
toki ga nagareru oshiro ga mieru
watashi no tegaketa kōfuku no
hihō o darega nogare eyō
 [...] (Nakahara (trans.), pp. 126–127)⁴

Considering the first line of both the original and translated text, instead of rendering a direct translation of *Ā kisetsuyo, ā shiroyo* (French: *Ô saisons, ô châteaux*; English: O seasons, o chateaux ...), Nakahara adds the two verbs *nagareru* (‘pass’) and *mieru* (‘are seen’) so that each phrase encompasses seven syllables. Scholar of French studies Usami contended approvingly that such a supplementation strengthened the vivid temporal and spatial images for readers (Sasaki et al., p. 79), but irrespective of the effects evoked by his translation, I would suggest he might be inextricably attached to the conventional 5-7 syllabic poetic pattern. Indeed, similar attempts to translate Rimbaud’s works could also be found in 「感動」 “*Kandō*” (Sensation) and in 「わが放浪」 “*Wagahōrō*” (My Bohemia (Fantasy)). His early education certainly contributed to it, but such a choice could also be explained by the uncertainty of the Japanese poetic literary world, as well as the ongoing mediation process between local classical works and western works. For example, in his own piece “Asa no Uta” (Morning Song), he writes:

On the ceiling, reddish

fait la magique étude / Du Bonheur, que nul n’élude. [...]”

⁴ The original translation reads 「季節(とき)が流れる、城寨(おしろ)が見える、/ 無疵(むきず)な魂(もの)なぞ 何処にあらう? / 季節が流れる、城寨が見える、/ 私の手がけた 幸福の / 秘法を誰が脱(のが)れ得よう。」

light leaked through the chink in the door,
 redolent of rustic martial music;
 my hands have nothing to turn to.
 The small birds' song is inaudible
 the sky today is a pale indigo;
 the weary man's heart
 —no-one would reproach it.
 The morning is vexed with the odour of resin;
 lost, the various dreams;
 the serried woods sound in the wind.
 [...] (Mackintosh and Sugiyama (trans.), p. 7)

The mediation between East and West can indeed be manifested in this poetry, as we can see that “Morning Song” resembles that of Rimbaud’s poem in terms of form, while in terms of content it delineates more about sensory stimuli, including the vision of the leaking light (line 2), the audio perception of small birds’ song (line 5) and olfaction of resin (line 9). Such sensory appeals as well as the intentional portrayal of various colors are undoubtedly imitations of Rimbaud. In addition, in terms of poetic form, “Morning Song” was written like some European sonnets, as were most of Rimbaud’s early works such as “Evil” (*Le Mal*) and “Winter Dream” (*Rêvé pour l’hiver*). However, unlike Rimbaud’s poems, in which either first-person or third-person narrative was employed, most of Nakahara’s narratives are rather vague. In “Morning Song,” instead of telling readers an abstract story, it shows them a series of pictures with each verse representing one image as if the poem can be split into four tanka-length poems. Such unique delineation of image is possibly due to his early education in old Japanese classics and tanka—a Japanese verse containing five lines, each line of which consists of five, seven, five, seven and seven syllables—as well as to his enthusiasm toward tanka writing (Fundō, 1974, pp. 44–45).

Likewise, Nakahara’s “dreams” differed from those of Rimbaud, too. While Rimbaud’s dreams are mostly positive and idealistic and his dream of creating a world free of ennui and pressure is clear, the Japanese poet here had ambiguous, “various dreams” (lines 10 & 14). So what do these dreams represent? Read together with “rustic martial music” and a “weary man’s heart,” they might symbolize his nostalgia toward either wartime or his heyday with his

old friend and lover. Born into a family whose father was a military doctor, Nakahara had led his elementary-school life in various cities in China and Japan (Sasaki et al., op. cit., pp. 6–7). One of the dreams might thus refer to his reminiscences of childhood. Another dream might also imply his yearning for his lost love, since his ex-girlfriend Yasuko Hasegawa left him and eloped with Hideo Kobayashi in 1924. In his *zuihitsu* (隨筆) essay “My Life,” he derided himself as a person with no consciousness (Nakahara, 2003, p. 352) and confessed that “I always make dreams. Those dreams are, as if sometimes blue in colour, and sometimes red in colour, dreams that I cannot ensure whether they are really dreams” (loc. cit.). The complexity of his dreams, then, not only implicitly reflected him as an individual but also the Japanese poetic community itself. From Nakahara’s constant negotiation between classical poetry writing and Western poetic techniques—how he conformed to the Japanese 5-7 syllabic form in many of his poems while trying to employ symbolist style—we could contend that modern Japan experienced in the 1920s “a crisis in the forms of literary representation” (Lippit, 1997, p. 3) across all genres of Japanese writing, and such movement between genres also brought forth the issue of identity: for example, a crisis about what constitutes a modern Japanese.

Nor is the structure of “The Morning Song” an entire imitation of Rimbaud or some other symbolist poet. While employing externally the form of a sonnet, Nakahara persists in the Japanese traditional musicality, i.e. the 7-5 or 5-7 syllabic convention, in the source text. Sugaya treated such persistence as an act to “establish new anachronism” (Yoshida et al., 1981, p. 293), the reason for which was “a spell” (ibid., p. 295) cast on Nakahara himself. In other words, he could hardly detach himself from his traditional education of the classics, and his poetry alone can be viewed as an allegory of conflict between westernizing Japanese poems and retaining the old customs of writing.

Dai’s Encounter with Rimbaud and French Literature

If Nakahara resembled Rimbaud in terms of biographical background, then the initial French learning experience of Dai Wang-shu also echoes that of Nakahara. Born in Hangzhou, China in 1905, Dai was educated there by his mother in classical Chinese before studying French literature at Aurora University in Shanghai in 1925 (Tao, 2009, pp. 198–205). Unlike Rimbaud, Dai did not hate classical literature, instead making use of his knowledge of Chinese and French literature to create his own work. Nevertheless, Dai’s encounter with

works of Rimbaud and other French poets was never coincidental. The late 1910s and the 1920s were a tumultuous era in China after the abolition of the Qing Empire in 1911. In 1919—the aftermath of the First World War and the year when the Versailles peace conference was held—for instance, a large-scale demonstration broke out on 4 May against Japan’s occupation of Shantung.⁵ Fear that China might not only lose her international status but would soon be colonized by western nations and Japan thus mounted. Many intellectuals therefore began to think of revolutionizing Chinese literature through absorbing western culture and style, in the hope of using words to save their nation. One famous example is Hu Shih’s vernacular movement in the late 1910s, during which he pioneered writing poems in free verse.⁶ Since it was in this age of literary revolution that Dai Wang-shu was raised and educated, it was thus justifiable for him to write new poems instead of classical ones.

But through his translation of numerous poems of French and other European origins, we can also see that Dai did not simply follow blindly foreign styles but rather incorporated and transformed them into something distinct from the original. For instance, in “古意答客問” (“*Guyi da ke wen*”, Classic answers to a friend), written on 5th December 1934, his third year into a sojourn in France, we can find the traces of classical style in the form of free verse:

My lonely heart follows the radiant mutations of the floating clouds.
 Eyes used to watching the blue sky are pleased by the green grass invading the threshold.
 You ask me where I find my happiness?
 In the bright moon at the window and the books beside my pillow.

At early dawn watching the mist lingering on the mountain tops,
 At dusk listening to the wind hovering among the flowers.
 You ask me where my soul takes its rest?
 Look at the smoke curling upwards from the chimney.

Drinking dew when thirsty, eating petals when hungry,
 The deer guards my dreams, the bird greets my waking,

⁵ Read Shinkichi Etō’s article (1986, pp. 74–115) for more details about the political and social unrest that happened during that period.

⁶ Detailed explanation of Hu Shih’s experience learning overseas and his concrete ideas about writing “new” poetry can be found in Jenine Heaton’s article (2012, pp. 35–55).

You ask me whether I have worldly worries?

Listen to the fading footsteps of the traveler of a hundred generations.

(Lee (trans.), 1989, p. 239)

Although the poem is written in vernacular Chinese in a relatively freer verse, we can observe rhymes in most lines in the original. Antithesis is quite noticeable in a couple of lines: the first line of the second stanza forms an antithesis with the second of the same stanza, while the first line in the third stanza forms another with the second line in the same stanza. While antithesis is rare in continental literature, it is more frequently used in classical Tang poetry.⁷ Like the poems of Rimbaud, this poem is also rich in natural images, such as “floating clouds,” “bright moon” and “mountain tops,” but upon a closer look, these images are possibly old Chinese literati allusions. For example, the third line “In the bright moon at the window and the books beside my pillow” might evoke in readers’ minds an archetype of a traditional Chinese literatus, who had to borrow the moonlight and study at night for the official examinations.

Reading the poem again but more macroscopically, we would agree that this poem is philosophical, which also reminded readers of Dai’s other poem “My Thoughts” (我思想, “Wo si xiang”), where he incorporated Zhuangzi’s thoughts along with Descartes’ in his work. But in terms of form, I suggest that it is quite similar to the poem in Rimbaud’s “Délire II” (1873) (Second Delirium) (pp. 234–235), where the persona asked “what was I drinking” (*Que buvais-je*; line 2), “what could I be drinking” (*Que pouvais-je boire*; line 5), and finally answered in the last line “Full of tears ... I could not drink” (*Pleurant, je ... ne pus boire*), just as Dai’s writing is in the form of question and answer.

From the above poem, we can thus observe how Dai flexibly and shrewdly put his classical Chinese knowledge to good use in his poetry. As the etymology of Chinese characters starts from pictographic images (Fang & Zhang, 2015, pp. 189–190), the language is seemingly compatible with French symbolist poetry too. Indeed, Dai wrote a set of seventeen poetic principles in “*Wangshu shilun*” (“望舒詩論” Wangshu’s Poetic Theory, 1932), where Dai emphasizes more the overall mood than musicality. Of most relevance are

⁷ For example, a lot of antitheses can be found in Du Fu (杜甫)’s “Prospect of Spring” (“春望”), and antithesis is even compulsory in the second and third lines when it comes to composing Five-Character and Seven Character Regulated Verse. For more examples of Tang poetry, refer to C. K. Ho’s book (2015).

his first, sixth and seventh principles:

1. Poetry cannot rely on musicality and should discard its musical qualities.
[...]
6. What is most important for new poetry is the “nuance” of poetic mood and not the “nuance” of characters and phrases.
7. Rhyme and regularity of lines may obstruct poetic mood, or deform poetic mood.
(Denton (trans.), pp. 316–217)

Obviously, in Dai’s mind, “poetic mood” should not lie in the rhyme and meter of the poem, but in the overall atmosphere felt by the readers. In this sense, it is understandable why Dai admired more Rimbaud’s narrative poems and translated them in veneration. Meanwhile, Dai does not relinquish everything of classical Chinese poetry, for he also writes that “diction of the old classics cannot be opposed when it bestows on us a new poetic mood” (loc. cit.) in the eleventh principle. This also explains why, in the previously analyzed poem “Guyi da ke wen”, Dai employed a lot of old phrases such as 躑躅 *zhizhu* (lingering) and 罌慮 *gualu* (worldly worries). Perhaps such an incorporation of the past language into the present, and such a French-symbolist style of Chinese new poetry is exactly what Dai aims at to achieve the co-existence of “*originalité*” and “cosmopolite” (ibid., p. 317).

The perfect amalgamation of old diction and the new style of poetry, and of reality and ideals, can be exhibited in Dai’s “*Yu zhong ti bi*” (“獄中題壁” Written On a Prison Wall), composed on 27th February, 1944 and compiled in his collected poetry *Zai nan de shui yue* (『災難的歲月』Years of Disaster, published in 1948) during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in the midst of the Second World War. During the Sino-Japanese War, Dai worked as a newspaper editor in Hong Kong, but in late 1941 he was arrested and put in jail. Gregory Lee (1989) commented that these poems, mostly written in prose, contain heavily nostalgic feelings (pp. 65–88). If true, I would argue that such an emotion originated from his pain over his vain resistance to the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong and their invasion of China.

If I die here, friends, do not be sad,
I shall always exist in your hearts.

One of you died in a cell in Japanese occupied territory.
He harboured deep hatred, you should always remember.

When you come back dig up his mutilated body from the mud,
Hoist his soul up high with your victory cheers.

And then place his bones on a mountain peak, to bask in the sun
And bathe in the wind.

In that dark damp dirt cell that was his sole beautiful dream. (Lao & Goldblatt (trans.),
1995, p. 514)

The poem begins with the conditional “if,” the poet envisioning the worst-case scenario, his death in the war. However, we find the mood gradually changes from extreme anguish to optimism. The death of the representative “he” is transformed to a future victory, and when his bones are placed at the peak and unified with the earth, his “beautiful dream” can finally be realized. In the first few stanzas, Dai uses very simple words to describe his antagonism towards the Japanese armies. But then in the last stanza Dai envisions that the Chinese would finally win the war. Just as Rimbaud moved his pen freely from the prosaic to the poetic, so does Dai in the last stanza, where the “bones” of his dead companion “bask in the sun / And bathe in the wind.” Despite facing great mental and physical pain, Dai is able to shuttle from the desperate to the positive through the poem.

Desperate Literary Pursuits of the Three Poets

Similar to Rimbaud, Dai also traveled extensively. Dai lived in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Paris and Lyon, and his cosmopolitan experience enabled him to write poetry rich in imagery. His experience also inspired him to revise his poetic theory. Although his poetic principle had already been established in 1932, he published second and third editions of the theory, namely *Shi lun ling za* (『詩論零札』The Odds and Ends of Poetic Theory), which are slight variations on his first (Dai, 1991, pp. 691–693; 701–703). Viewed in this aspect, we can see Dai’s continuous pursuit of an ideal form of new poetry. Such a pursuit somehow resembles that of Nakahara as well, as most of his nostalgic poems seemed to be a desperate attempt to reconstruct his ideal past. We can nevertheless see a difference between Dai and Nakahara. The former is more like a positive-minded wanderer aiming at a better future, or hoping that

the future can move nearer to his ideals, while the latter is a pessimistic mind-traveler. The loss of his love, and later the death of his son, dealt a great blow to Nakahara, and because of this, most of his poems are colored with a layer of melancholy.

The Japanese Bohemian, however, unlike Rimbaud, is not a physical wanderer but more like a mind-wanderer, as the former let his mind ramble freely, while the later physically traveled in a substantial way. The French poet is perceived as a figure of physical exile, while Nakahara did not travel on foot but through his psyche. For instance, Rimbaud's "Festivals of Hunger" (*Fêtes de la faim*) and "Comedies of Thirst" (*Comédies de la soif*) were written during his journey with Paul Verlaine in September 1872 to London (Ivry, 1998, p. 58). Unable to earn any money, he expressed through these two pieces his lust for food and alcohol. If, as Ruff (1968) suggested, "sad softness and aerial purity dominates his life, and it is his distaste for life that composes the tonality [of his poetry]" (p. 132), his pessimism toward reality enabled him to create a Bohemian image and to travel to the supposedly pure countryside as a way to escape from the heavily polluted cities. The miserable poet, as a result, expressed not only his physical thirst but also that for happiness. In the last section of "Comedy of Thirst," he writes:

The pigeons which tremble in the field,

Game, on the run, seeing night,

Water-creatures, bidden beasts,

The final butterflies ... are thirsty too. (Sorrell (trans.), pp. 174–175; original ellipsis)

We can see how Rimbaud captures the frightening moments of the forest including the trembling pigeons and the thirsty butterflies. Though translated into "game" by Sorrell, the original term *le gibier* also signifies "prey," and the first verse suggests panic and fear: he seems to signal to himself that danger is inevitable in nature, let alone in the human world. I suppose it is his confession of "the weak being the prey of the strong" (Ruff, 1968, p. 132) that wins Ruff's commendation of his "pure" poetry writing. Likewise, the verse can also be interpreted as portraying the disappearing natural habitat because of the negligence of a demoralizing rural society (Harvie & Matthew, 2000, pp. 83–84) followed by rapid industrial development. Thus, in the last line of the second verse his rhetorical question of "Whose burgeonings fill these forests" (line 8) expresses his desperate hope for a re-invigorated nature.

In contrast to Rimbaud's figure of exile in his poems, Nakahara always presented to his readers veritable photomontages to enable them to travel in mind with the poet. Take "Circus" as an example:

There were several eras;

There were brown wars

There were several eras;

In winter, gales blew.

[...]

The fool parachute's nostalgia;

yu-an, yu-yon, yu-ya-yu-yon.

(Mackintosh & Sugiyama (trans.), p. 5)

'Circus' highlights strongly the theme of nostalgia by presenting the images of an old, disused circus. The second line's "brown wars" might represent the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, while the color itself evokes the old and the past. Keene (1983) was puzzled by the last line "yu-an, yu-yon, yu-ya-yu-yon" and conjectured the "rhythm ... evokes the emptiness and futility of his life at the time" (p. 348). Fundō (1974), however, suggested it was a melody both imitating traditional Japanese folk songs and simulating the sound of a swing (p. 87). The employment of onomatopoeia might also be due to the influence of Dada, as, in "Jimetsu" (「自滅」 Self-destruction, 1924), for instance, he repeats the word "leg" (*ashi*) in three consecutive lines and in a disorderly manner, perhaps to simulate the sound of walking. But irrespective of interpretations, it is valid to say that the works of Nakahara are not a mere mirror image of those of Rimbaud but encompass a pastiche of poetic techniques that formulates the uniqueness of Nakahara.

Overall, then, through creating pictures of desolateness, Nakahara on one hand takes us back to his reminiscences of encounters with an old circus, and on the other hand exhorts us to lament the rapid changing of time. Both Rimbaud and Nakahara portray to their readers their Bohemian image, but the French poet expresses very often his bodily despair and languor, while Nakahara narrates his mental ennui unconsciously.

Conclusion: Crisis Creates New Styles of Writing

The uniqueness of Rimbaud's poetry is not simply a product of a miserable childhood and unfortunate encounter with sexual abuser Paul Verlaine, but also of the social unrest in late-nineteenth-century France and its rapid urban development. Likewise, Nakahara's portrayal of the *poète maudit*, or social outcast, is ascribable to the turbulent era he belonged to. He touches several times upon the subject of humanity in his diary and emphasizes the importance of the "poetic mind" (2003, p. 45) in one of his essays, all of which are his subtle responses to a modernizing Japan. Seemingly he suggests it is important not to lose our morality in the face of any changes. Dai belonged to a turbulent era, as I have mentioned earlier. It is perhaps because of the turbulent literary world that the two Asian poets could experiment with Rimbaud and many different styles of writing, and ultimately make him a poet uniquely relevant in the early twentieth century. Indeed, while the translation of western works often seems to transform the local tradition of literary writing, one should not neglect how the translation of other poems affects the stylistics and form of one's creative poetry writing. Dai Wangshu is clearly a very good exponent, and I have shown how his unique historical, cultural and biographical background likewise led to negotiation between French symbolism and Chinese classics. An ongoing examination of this process will eventually deepen our understanding of cultures in mutual contact.

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