The Evolution of Ai Qing's Poetic Style: From Deeply Contemplative to Clear and Optimistic

Yijin Li*

College of Liberal Arts, Zhuhai College of Science and Technology University, Zhuhai, China

*Corresponding author: 07230606@zhc.edu.cn

Abstract. This paper focuses on the evolution of Ai Qing's poetic style. Based on tracing the trajectory of his creative development, and by integrating the Chinese poetic tradition, comparisons with his contemporaries, and close readings of specific texts, it delves into the transformation of his style from the “deeply contemplative and cadenced” mode of the 1930s-40s to the “clear and optimistic” mode post-1950s. Through analyzing the imagery choice, linguistic rhythm, and emotional tone in representative works such as Snow Falls on China’s Land and The Reef, connecting to Du Fu's “poetic history” tradition, and contrasting the creative characteristics of poets like Bian Zhilin and Guo Moruo, this study reveals the inevitability and uniqueness of Ai Qing's stylistic evolution. The research finds that this shift was not only a response to historical changes and a reflection of personal experience but, more importantly, an embodiment of modern Chinese poetry's exploration of balance between “inheriting tradition” and “innovating for reality”. It demonstrates the development of the poet's artistic pursuit while also providing a valuable paradigm for interpreting the deep connections between literature and its era, and between the individual and the collective, highlighting the vitality of modern poetry in maintaining its essence and innovating amidst the tides of time.

Keywords: Ai Qing; deeply contemplative and cadenced; clear and optimistic; stylistic evolution.

1. Introduction

Ai Qing is referred to as the singer of his time in the history of the modern Chinese poetry. Ai Qing had a poetic career that spanned over half a century, and his style evolved as per the situation in history culminating into a dense and pessimistic style of poetry to a lightheaded and positive style of poetry. As a matter of fact, it is not just the document of the alterations of personal aesthetic, but also documents the self-adaptation and re-work of the Chinese poetry in response to such immense social alterations of 20 th century.

The 1930s and 1940s were marked by the fact that China was in the shadow of war and possible national subordination, large areas of the country were lost and citizens displaced. Ai Qing directed this fact into her poems such as *Dayanhe -My Nanny* and *Snow Falls on the Land* of China, flooding land and night imagery with pity of the woe of the lower classes, and worry towards the future of the nation. This showed the deep scars brought about by the war on the Chinese especially innocent and vulnerable women and the readers feel more the ruthlessness and wickedness of war [1]. His diction was simple, but substantial, his tone low and halting, and he made the very essence of his early thoughtful style. When society had adopted a new appearance through the establishment of the People Republic, it was this euphoria of construction and an idealistic nature that filled his poetry. The image of early anguish was substituted in the works such as *The Reef*, in which the rock seem to smile, and in Ode to Light, where the light can light up the future. His lines were brighter, the rhythm was raised even higher, clarity and optimism became the key toning of his subsequent works.

Even though, with the agreement of academic field, it must be admitted that the style development of Ai Qing was a mirror of the time, still, on the one hand, these judgments are mostly floating, on the periodical, surface level, and on the other hand, there is not enough communication about his mediums in which he was going to inherent the tradition of the Chinese poetry, the specificities of his personal style in comparison to that of his contemporaries, and the internal coherence of this style formation.

2. The “Deeply Contemplative and Cadenced” Style of Ai Qing's Early Poetry (1930s-40s)

2.1. Writing Suffering and the Inheritance of the “Poetic History” Spirit

The national peril anxiety and sympathy with the suffering of the lower classes with which the early poetry of Ai Qing is pervaded are variations of the temperament of Du Fu, with his tradition of solemnly pensive and cadenced expression reprised. Du Fu, referred to as the poet-historian wrote the blood and tears of the common people in the An Lushan Rebellion as he wrote the poem the Three Officers and the Three Partings in the 1930s-40s Amidst the smoke of war in the still, Ai Qing likewise wrote poems that documented the trauma of the nation in the same vein as poetry can express grievances.

Shortly after the complete breakout of the War of Resistance in 1937, Ai Qing had a chance to see masses of refugees crowding the streets of Wuhan and wrote *Snow Falls on China Land*. The lines that begin with the poem are the first two: Snow falls on the land of China, / Cold is blockading China, these two are used form the very beginning up to the end: the snow, the cold are not the previous weather conditions any more, they give some ideas of national desperation. The outcry of Ai Qing to resist and lyricism did not only soothe the poem with symbolic color, but also the song of the theme of resisting to the end to protect the land [2]. The poet never directly condemns but rather allows the farmer, the young woman, the mother to take their turn in succession exposing one wound after another as the wound of the era. This process of seeing the big in the small is slightly allied with The country ruined Unheard hills and streams remain, / Spring in the city, plants and trees grow deep This is a nod to the form of the Stab in the back technique of narration though it does not make the full rhetorical impact of those two earthquakes, “cold China” and what follows, Plants and trees grow deep, spring in the city the Stab in the back technique of The nation shattered Unheard hills and streams remain, Spring in the city, plants and trees grow deep.

This dejection is brought to the extreme in I Love This Land. After seeing the devastation of Japanese bombing in 1938 in Guilin, Ai Qing composed the words his life is immortal: Why are my eyes always full of tears? Since I love this land dearly,... the poet metamorphoses into reaching the dying land, steaming rivers, and furious wind with a hoarse throat till even my feathers rot in the soils. The growth of land as Dayanhe to all Chinese countryside involves the imagination of the whole Chinese countryside under that particular history context [3]. This intense feeling of sacrificing oneself to the land is the complete devotion to the motherland as well as the resistance to sufferings. It creates heartbreaking sorrow in iron strength in the back and forth of individual and national destiny.

2.2. Core Imagery: Vessels of Suffering and Symbols of Oppression

The imagery in Ai Qing's early poetry consistently clings to 'suffering' and 'oppression.' He translates the abstract trauma of the era into concrete, palpable images, suffusing the entire poem with a tragic aesthetic atmosphere. “Land” is the most core imagery in Ai Qing's early poetry. It transcends geography, becoming the embodiment of the motherland, the people, and history. It condenses the poet's deepest love for the motherland as a maternal earth and also condenses his deepest love for the laborers born, toiling, and dying upon it, and his concern and exploration of their fate [4]. The land depicted in The North is barren and sorrowful, yet also tenacious and eternal. This land carries the rich historical heritage of the Chinese nation, for which every Chinese person feels an inseparable deep attachment. However, during the War of Resistance, Japanese invaders seized Chinese territory, and the nation faced an unprecedented crisis. The work expresses that this land both bears the millennia of suffering of the Chinese nation and gives birth to an indomitable vitality [5]. “Night” is another crucial image in Ai Qing's writing, condensing the dark social reality and suffocating atmosphere of the times. In Night, the poet writes, “The dark of night / Like a black cat / Crouches outside my window”. That “black cat” brings not only physiological fear but also pushes the psychological pressure from the Japanese iron heel and social turmoil before the reader's eyes. In The Beggar, the scene shifts: “In the cold wind of the north, / A beggar / With a hoarse voice / Pleads to

you—/ Give me a little warmth, / A little food…“The poet makes “the suffering masse” themselves the image, laying bare the individual's struggle for survival amidst war. This courage to gaze directly at trauma distantly echoes the critical edge of Du Fu's “Behind red doors meat and wine go to waste; / Out on the road lie the bones of the frozen”.

2.3. Plain, Weighty Language and Prose-like Rhythm

In order to re-reward the reflective spirit and the suffering themes, the initial poetry of Ai Qing actively dumps decorative wording, the language of the poetry shifts back to simplicity and solemnity. Sentences are prose-style rhythm varied by emotional rises and falls, and they attain a cadenced feeling of meter in undulations.

This linguistic style is the central one in Dayanhe My Nanny. This poem was dedicated by Ai Qing to his wet nurse Dayanhe who brought him up. This he illuminates in prose-like long lines, with a sort of colloquial earnestness, thus narrating her life: Dayanhe, today, seeing the snow makes me think of you: Your grave, straw-covered, snow-pushed, Your dead tiles on the roof of your closed former residence, Your mortgaged one-square-zhanggarden plot, Your stone stool in front of your door full of green moss... The lines also lack rhyme intent, but, with the repetition of parallel constructions, Your, suffering is distributed layer upon layer, grave, former dwelling, garden, stone stool; every detail is desolate. Unlike the simple elegance of Du Fu in his line of never be content until my line amazes, this technique of using prose as poetry lets the emotion just come down, its rhythm is relaxed but not laden with inner power; plain words work silently to build up heart-wrenching pain, letting the reader quietly be moved as he reads so slowly and silently.

This linguistic trait is perpetuated in the opening of Facing the Sun: “ rise-- / Like a weary beast / A hurt beast / From the woods withered with withered leaves I rise--/ Shaking off the nightmares of last night / And the icy raindrops⋯.” In contrasting himself to a tired animal straining in its agony, the language is simple but very also graphic: the shaking off of nightmares and the shaking off of raindrops alike denote shaking off darkness and suggest looking forward to light. The rhythm becomes narrowed, and loosened, exactly in keeping with the swings of feeling--this time is the clue of the seriously ruminative manner.”

3. The “Clear and Optimistic“ Style of Ai Qing's Later Poetry (Post-1950s)

3.1. Praise of Light and Endorsement of the Era

This book *The Reef* was written in the year 1954, when China was taking the socialist building up. The country was in ruins but it was easy to see that the morale was soaring everywhere. Ai Qing displays *The reef* as a resistant and faithful watchdog: Wave after wave / Breaks on it endlessly, smashing into its feet / Tearing into spray, scattering its waters... Its face its body scarred by knives, yet it stands there smiling and watches the sea. The glomments are never-ending downfalls; *the reef* is the people of China, who have risen high in spite of injuries. The contrasting of the bloodied body and face with smiling turns hope in the face of adversity into a sculpture. This will believe in the future despite the scars which William faintly echoes when Li Bai wrote of riding the wind and cleaving the waves; / I will hoist my cloud-white sail and sail across the sea which foams. They are both poems of life and life-affirming.

After 10 years of silence Ai Qing took his pen in 1978 to write this 300 lines poem. Light no longer is as nature, but refined into truth, wisdom, and ideals. By paralleled form the passionate eulogy of the poet also brings out individual delight in recovered voice as well as relates to the renewal of Chinese society in the early reform period. The meter of the poem increases in scale, gradually growing layer at layer, with the grandiose, approval and infusion of blessings towards the era of the time on a grand scale through a high tone.

3.2. Symbols of Hope and Metaphors of Rebirth

On the one hand, the imagery that has connotation of hope, i.e., light and hope, is a desire to win and seek freedom of the poet, which is his beautiful hope of rebirth [6]. With the change in the emotional tone, the very imagery of the later poems of Ai Qing slides out of the objects of horror to symbols of hope. Every picture is filled with the throb of resurrection, somewhat following the rhythm of spirituality of the new world.

The image of sun is continuous and important in the further poetry of Ai Qing. In The Words of the Sun the writer allows the sun to speak to him: open your windows open your doors, Let me in, Let me in, Into your little rooms. I carry golden flowers, / I carry wood fragrance, I bring light and warmth, I bring dewdrops on me,... The sun here is no longer the remote and distant, cold, star of the previous lines but a sort of messenger carrying treasures; bouquets, foulour, light, and dew stream into the cottage and bring the new life that New China promised in concrete and miniature life to the reader. The sun of Ai Qing does not want to grandeur somewhere, but transfer more serious things, warmth and hope, in every hand, and bright images spew the freshness of the time.

The figure of light is taken to its extreme in Ode to Light. Light has personal, unique feelings and experiences of Ai Qing, but it is also extremely permeated with remnants of the times [5]. The poet makes it more than a natural event: he makes it a thread of the human civilization and social development. The reconstruction of the image of the reef is also the sign of the creativity of Ai Qing: in the initial poems it was a rather mute spectator of the suffering; in The Reef the poet provides it with the personification of a smile as changing it into the symbol of hope and persistence. This change does not only indicate the change of mind by the poet but also capturates the religious temper of the time.

3.3. Lucid, Fluent Language and an Exhilarating Rhythm

In order to reproduce the mood and image of hope of the first part of the poem, Ai Qing, in his subsequent lines, became clearer and brighter, syntactically normal, rhythm higher, and forced to read sonorously and freeze making the song of hope a resounding hymn.

This linguistic orientation is central to Notice of Dawn, a writing in Yanan, of 1942. Through the mouth of the symbolic figure of dawn, the whole poem shouts the coming of the new era: I announce to you/ Dawn comes to the east / Open your windows/ Open your doors/Let me in, let me in/ I bring morning sun and dew/ I bring hope and courage/ I bring news of future... There is a clean arrangement in short lines, the imperative mood of I announce to you and Please open is devoid of turn about. Such words as morning glory, dew, hope, courage are heavy with colorful brightness; its rhythm is cheerful and drives the impetus of the necessary birth and happiness to the reader. This is more straightforward in comparison with the relaxed and low Dayanhe, My Nanny, the rhythm of the times can be easily felt with the help of the rhythmic beat. This hope of the past slowly turns into an engine that gears towards winning; the healed poet equally turns into one of the millions striving towards a better future and the happiness of people [7].

4. Comparative Perspective and Internal Continuity in the Evolution of Ai Qing's Poetic Style

4.1. Comparison with Contemporary Poets

The stylistic development of Ai Qing was not solitary but was in line with the trend of the 20 th century Chinese poetry. Situated between such contemporary authors as Bian Zhilin and Guo Moruo, one can see his individual mark better.

In the same spirit as the poets of the “July School Ai Qing also emphasized realistic distinction and emotional depth in the center of poetry in his early years but was different in style. A high-pitched style and multiple imagery was a regular characteristic of Hu Feng, Lü Yuan, and others, with their attitude to reality being harsh and blunt. Ai Qing leaned towards prose like, free sentence formations

where the rhythm gradually built up. Luyuan in To the Naive Optimist writes, Do you believe? A rose of heaven, splitting reality with contrasting extremes, opens the gates of the hell. The cold China of Ai Qing, Snow Falls on China Land, serves to back the heartbreaking suffering- the former being the one of burning fire, and the latter that being the one of undercurrent. It is precisely this that is due to the personal interpretation of the concept of deep contemplation by Ai Qing, who sees strength in not saying no, but in the depth of the feeling swirling within evenness.

The difference in inward temperaments between them was eminent compared to Guo Moruo despite the fact that both had a similar direction in their transformation of style. The sun in the poetry of Ai Qing comes after going through darkness; he thought that light is cultivated by the darkness and death. This is unlike what Guo Moruo views whose sun begins with light itself [8]. The early Goddess of Guo Moruo was an ardent personage; the shout of We are reborn! We are reborn! we are reborn! that in Nirvana of the Phoenix takes the charge of disillusionment in the old world to the limit and the wish to have the new world. The first years of Ai Qing, however, hung long upon the agony itself; the accent of singing with tears in I Love This Land is even more sunken than the scream of Goddess. Later on, Guo Moruo chose the lyrical political path; the slogan-like quality of the lines is provided by the openness of the line of Ode to New China, which says: Peoples China, stand up firm in the East. Ai Qing, in The Reef and Ode to Light, however, kept with her the employment of imagery, metaphor and linguistic chastisement, the smile of the reef, not only applauds tenacity but eludes the naked political censure. His subsequent writings are permitted to have increased chewable artistic conflict by this writing meaning through imagery technique.

In comparison with Bian Zhilin, Ai Qing has always held his poetry to close to the popular taste without experimenting with formalist approaches. The Fragment by Bian Zhilin, "You see the landscape by the bridge, / The sightseeing by the balcony" is charming in thoughts and stylistic device; the words used are not pedantry, but concealing within themselves rather obscure metaphors, more conducive to the intellectual palate. Ai Qing differed. In his early Dayanhe--My Nannyto his later Notice of Dawn, he selected simple and commanding diction, drew inspiration and content out of the commonplace, turning emotion into the commonplace individual. This act of emotionally touching the heart of people made his poems have a naturally broader range of readers as opposed to Bian Zhilin and other poets of the modernist movement.

4.2. Internal Continuity in Stylistic Evolution

The shift of the style in Ai Qing did not consist of a sudden break but an organically motivated continuation of his artistic life, in his relationship to the changing historical circumstances. In the sweet early contemplative background sound, there was always the lust to light. His solemn view of history and life never faded when the tone subsequently inclined to it. This fibre this time through internal pulse gave credible persuasion to the metamorphosis of style.

Even in his first works, there was dark flashing of light. In his most reflective period the Sun (1937) is filled with lines such as; “Out of the old graves / out of the dark ages / out of the river of human mortality / Rattling the sleeping mountains / like a burning taxi-wheel in the winds / The sun comes rolling down to me... The sun in the poem cuts through the darkness creating a desire of light. This is echoed in the subsequent The Words of the Sun with the sun. The scream of I walk towards the sun in Facing the Sun also identifies how the poet did not rest on lingering low; early meditations already included hope) and created a thread towards future insight.

The critical advantage and historical load of the poetry of Ai Qing never became dulled by time in his later period. Great Amphitheater of Ancient Rome is a piece, written in 1979, which could be viewed as the representatives of this phase. By the tragic destiny of the slaves at the amphitheater, the poet refers to the situation of the intellectuals during the decade of turmoil: “How many white bones / Rot in the sand of the amphitheater / How many blood heads of heroes / flow to the floor of the amphitheater stone floor… The amphitheater is a historical relic and a reflection of reality. Though the poet is pleasing the light, he continues to suffer in his view. This contemplation in joy is a far off reply to the initial contemplation in sorrow, so that his bass note is never empty.

It is such inner coherence, as a result of the constant reconciliation of personal lyricism and narrative of time, artistic and social mission of Ai Qing. He always approached poetry as a weapon since his early reflections and subsequent light, early writing was personal feeling and dramatic shift; always trying to find the beauty of the art form, as well as performing a social duty. The very concept remains the same, and the transformation of styles, therefore, creates an overall whole with no evidence of disorder.

5. Underlying Causes and Multidimensional Value of the Evolution of Ai Qing's Poetic Style

5.1. Dual Drivers: Era and the Individual

The poetic style Ai Qing had developed was the product of the cleansing-up of the movement of his epoch and of the ups and downs of personal destiny; these two sources were naturally united in drawing him into new aesthetic territory.

The current of the time predetermined the orientation of his style. The bloody revolutions of 20 th century China gave the first universal note of Ai Qing: the incessant struggle and national catastrophe of the 1930s- 40s threw a dark cloud on both the land and the people. This general suffering permeated his poetry and became the tone of the profound thought vehement of the contemplative and cadenced. Only that Du Fu composed the three officers and the three partings when there was the affair of the An Lushan Rebellion, and Ai Qing composed the *Snow Fall on the land of China* when he was among the smokes of war, and made the anguish a rhythmically low chant. The advent of the 1950s, the formation of the new regime, construction sites and factories, a shift in social feeling towards despair to aspiration, correlative changes in the lines he wrote. Ai Qing started to eulogize light, work, and tomorrow; the gray of the previous years gave place to clear and optimistic. The latter was driven by a change in the tone of the age, and this change of the emotional axis of poetic activity was transferred to the other pole as the most noticeable objective factor in changing style.

The influences of personal fortune were the internal forces of the stylistic development of Ai Qing. He was put to prison at a young age as he took part in a revolution, and created Dayanhe, My nanny in prison, in prison, his cell life compelled him to face the darkness of the society. Upon release, wandering aimlessly throughout a large portion of China, he was able to experience the horror of the multitude. The experiences had worked to shape the writing position to criticizing reality, sympathizing with weak into his first writing position and deeply considering the poetry tone. Following freedom, when life and creative conditions were gaining momentum, Ai Qing became the Vice Chairman of the Chinese Writers Association. Such new political identity made him sink into the spirit of socialist building. He never recoiled in his belief in light even at the time when he was hit during the decade of turmoil. The betterment of the situation and honest recognition with the new epoch drew him out of anxiety and pity to glee, acclaim, and anticipation and was the inner force of the turn of style.

5.2. The Significance of Stylistic Evolution for the Individual, Poetic History, and Society

The development of the poetic style of Ai Qing is not just the growth history of the individual artistic life but also possesses several values on the poetic history and society level, that provides significant information about the formation of the modern Chinese poetry. There is plenty of life and mundane color in his poetry, yet in a world that was rooted quick and solid, which is not in their cliché or in the quaint traditions of earlier poets; they, at the same time, are full of the vitality of life and its true color, though, at the same time, include the brilliant spirit of the times and the serious humanistic concern and indignant emotion, manifesting) an emotionalization of poetic images [9].

In the style of the writing of Ai Qing, this migration tended to be a deliberate self-renewal. He did not stay in the initial reflective tone but shifted his eyes and modified his voice according to the rhythm of the time.At the same time,Ai Qing uses his pens to record the life of their times, also

document their own joys, anger, sorrows, and the process of growing up [10]. Such responsiveness to the need to keep abreast of the time, was rendering his poetic territory all the more full: able not only to descend into trauma and struggling of the nation, but also to whistle of regeneration and optimism. The six years between *Dayanhe--My Ny* and *Ode to Light* shrink the half-century gap into a net of themes of suffering, ann resistance, light, hope, etc., and then gives him to the contemporaries the most permanent creative life of a poet.

In the tradition of the Chinese modern poetry, the stylistic development of Ai Qing is frequently regarded as an example of the Chinese modernization within the stylistic lineage of the old. The highly thoughtful and lamented tone at his first step obviously bears the burden of poetical history of Du Fu and the melancholic outcry of poetry with the ability to complain, unobtrusively injecting the classical texture of the aesthetic of the wife into the present-day verse. His brush later became clear and brightly colored, again responding with a hint of solemn piety to the Hymns of the Classic of Poetry, to the perfect light of the High Tang, and accomplished the completion of the contemporary awakening of tradition. At the same time his subject matter always remained solid: initially by drawing on land and night to mark the trauma of the country, then sun and light to announce the beginning of the age, freeing new poetry of being called airborne, making it a reflection of reality. This innovative course of traditionalism but with the realistic approach, gives the modern Chinese poetry aesthetic model worthy of imitation.

To the readers and the society at large, the poetry of Ai Qing is initially perceived as a kind of messenger of the spirit of the times. *Snow Falls on China Land* written at the beginning of the war reveals the nation in its suffering and perseverance so that one can feel the hot blood even in cold, thus creating the desire to salvage the nation. His subsequent *The Reef* writes tell of disappointments as sprays next to a reef, and how one gets a glimpse of the light amidst the turmoil, giving him confidence to go back to the homeland building. Such works are not crafting by the word, these are the textual reflexion of the rhythm of the epoch with the rhythm of the heartbeat of the reader-you can hear the echo of her/his own feelings and see the process of the historical development. The fact that there is an overlap of the I and we in the lines gives the forms of poetry that is more of a bridge between the individual and the society hence creating its social worth.

6. Conclusion

The poetic modifications of Ai Qing had been the joint action of the Chinese society of the 20 th century and self-experience. This metamorphosis of his happens in the three degrees, at the level of affect, between the feeling of pity of suffering and the feeling of light delight, at visual symbols, between the ships of suffering and symbols of hope, at the level of language, between the usual seriousness and the un fogged cheerfulness. This metamorphosis is by no means a sudden drama, but a coordinated extension of the dispute between personal lyricism and epic narrative of the era, carries on hope of New Life.

The contribution of the stylistic development of Ai Qing is not just the fullness of the personal artistic life but more to the point it could offer a creative way of being deeply rooted in the tradition and has its foundation in the reality and creates an important paradigm in comprehending the connection between literature and times, individual and the group. He has written in Ode to Light: Light is the fountain of hope, the symbol of eternity. The poetry of Ai Qing is a ray of light that casts light on the progress trajectory of the modern Chinese poetry and turns into an eternal monument of its era.

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