

# INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER





## RUPKATHA JOURNAL

ON INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN HUMANITIES





ISSN 0975-2935







### About the Journal

<b>Journal DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha">https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha</a>
<b>Journal Home</b>	<a href="http://www.rupkatha.com">www.rupkatha.com</a> 
<b>Indexed by</b>	Scopus  Web of Science: Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)  DOAJ 
<b>Journal Metrics</b>	CiteScore 2020: 0.2   SJR 2020: 0.162   SNIP 2020: 0.193   JCI 2020: 0.50

### About the Issue

<b>Themed issue</b>	<b>Volume 4, number 1, 2022 (January-March)   Contemporary East and Southeast Asian Literary and Cultural Studies</b>
<b>Guest Editors</b>	<a href="#">Dr Jeremy de Chavez</a>  & Dr Zhang Yue, University of Macau, China
<b>Issue DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n1">https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n1</a>
<b>TOC</b>	<a href="https://rupkatha.com/v14n1.php">https://rupkatha.com/v14n1.php</a> 
<b>Peer Review</b>	Under the responsibility of the Guest Editors

### About the Article

<b>Title</b>	<b>The Poetics of Fei Ming: How the Classical Merged with the Modernist</b>
<b>Author/s</b>	<b>Candy Fan Wang</b> 
<b>Affiliation</b>	Foreign Languages College, Shanghai Normal University, China
<b>ORCID</b>	Not available
<b>Funding</b>	<b>No funding received. Published free of any charge.</b>
<b>Article DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n1.02">https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n1.02</a> <b>Pages: 1-11</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<a href="https://rupkatha.com/v14n102">https://rupkatha.com/v14n102</a> 
<b>Full-text PDF</b>	<a href="https://rupkatha.com/V14/n1/v14n102.pdf">https://rupkatha.com/V14/n1/v14n102.pdf</a> 
<b>Article History</b>	Abstract received: 29 March 2021   Complete article received: 8 June 2021 Revised article received: 22 Sept 2021   Accepted: 2 Dec 2021 <b>First Published: 05 February 2022</b>
<b>Article Impact</b>	<a href="#">Check Dynamic Impact</a> 
<b>Copyright</b>	<a href="#">Aesthetics Media Services</a> 
<b>Licensing</b>	<a href="#">Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0</a> 

This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For citation use the DOI. For commercial re-use, please contact [editor@rupkatha.com](mailto:editor@rupkatha.com).

## Research Article

---

# The Poetics of Fei Ming: How the Classical Merged with the Modernist

Candy Fan Wang

Foreign Languages College, Shanghai Normal University, China

---

### Abstract

Fei Ming 废名(1901-1969) is an iconic fictionist who had mastered the fusion of Chinese classical literary images with Western modernist writing techniques, a glaring label overshadowing his accomplishments in poetry. This paper looks at Fei Ming's footprint in poetry within the context of the reforming and modernizing process of Chinese poetry in the first half of the 20th century. It offers a particular angle of viewing Fei Ming's undervalued poetic aesthetics, in which he seamlessly reconciled the confrontational forces vacillating the development of Chinese poetry, namely, traditional form versus modern form and Chinese style versus Western style. Specifically, he blended modern philosophy with traditional lyricism to create natural flows of beauty and imbedded the Western symbolist and imagist techniques in forming a unique Chinese poetry style without compromising the sense of coherence. His proposal that new poetry should embrace a poetic "mind" with a prose-like "body" has shaped the making of Chinese modern poetry in its time of need. His equal treatment of the poetic elements of Chinese tradition and Western modern manifests a new interpretation of modernist poetry, a different mentality to approach modernism, and further a distinct paradigm of global modernisms, alternative to the Anglo-American ones.

**Keywords:** Fei Ming, modern Chinese poetry, poetic theory, global modernisms.

### 1. Introduction

Fei Ming came into his own in the late 1920s when he published several pastoral novellas and soon became one icon of the later-called *Jingpai* literary school. During his entire career as a writer, poet, literary critic, and Buddhist scholar, he practised and coalesced his thoughts on fiction, prose, poetry, aesthetics, and religion, which gradually transformed into a unique aesthetic synthesis. He has perfected the Chinese-style "poetic novel (Wu, 1997, p. 119)", thanks to his exquisite taste of beauty in balancing Chinese classical literary images with Western modernist techniques. However, Fei Ming's contributions to a broader spectrum of literature, especially that in modern Chinese poetry, have been comparatively less appreciated.

In this paper, I argue that Fei Ming's poetic practices and theories offered one viable track for Chinese *new poetry*. Specifically, the poet Fei Ming had two major contributions: first, his poetic theory, which put forward an important proposition that "*new poetry* should have the content of poetry yet the language of prose" (Fei Ming, On 2009b, p. 1629), promoted the maturity of Chinese *new poetry*, and at the same time preserved the continuity from its predecessor; second, his poetic

practices, which reconciled the Chinese traditional poetic elements with Western modernist philosophical thinking, made another prototype variant of global modernisms. As a whole, Fei Ming's poetic writing and theories served as a new paradigm, not only for understanding the direction that modern Chinese poetry has taken, or illustrating Chinese modern intellectuals' both adaptation of Western thoughts and rebuilding of their traditional aesthetic system but also for enriching the archive of global modernisms to decentralize the unitary perspective of modernist studies.

## 2. Poetic "mind" with a prose-like "body"

As the everlasting quintessence of the language as well as the supreme literary form in ancient China, Chinese poetry began its decades-long metamorphosis in January 1917 when Hu Shi published his famous manifesto "A Proposal for Literary Reform", declaring that *new poetry* should be free verse in vernacular, which was followed by many politicians and intellectuals including Chen Duxiu, Liu Bannong, Qian Xuetong, etc. As "the breakthrough point for the May Fourth literature revolution" (Qian, Wen, & Wu, 2010, p. 92), modern Chinese poetry at the beginning was endowed with political purposes and social revolutionary agendas that it was launched by modern literati as "a self-proclaimed iconoclast struggling against a formidable predecessor: the heritage of three millennia of classical poetry" (Yeh, 1991, p. 11). They further escalated the tension between modern and classical Chinese poetry by promoting the very concept of "modern" in both literary and sociopolitical semantic fields, while depicting traditional poetry as a synonym for the banal and outdated culture of feudal China. In the eyes of reformers, *new poetry* needs to "reassert its identity and relevance by shaking off the formalist fetters of codified prosodies and outmoded conventions" for the new nation to "throw off the political and psychological shackles of a colonial power or its premodern past" (Crespi, 2016, p. 121). Thus, the early development of modern Chinese poetry was marked by the inevitable confrontation between *new poetry* and its predecessors, including regulated verse, *ci*, and *qu*.

While Hu's famous "Eight Don'ts" paved the path for the development of *new poetry* with his request of using colloquial language, there were still dissents voiced by other poets, e.g., those represented by Xueheng School 学衡派, who disapproved of Hu's total obsolescence of the ancient poetic form and wished for a moderate reform for *new poetry*, i.e., combining "new materials with old form" (Qian et al., 2010, p. 94). In the mid-1920s, "discussions over technical aspects of *new poetry* such as rhythm, rhyme, and other prosodic features" were still heated (Liu, 2001); however, the development stalled as some were obsessed with the "clichéd imagery from traditional Chinese poetry" while others indulged themselves in the "awkward use of exotic imagery" (Liu, 2001). What impeded the convergence between the two paths was such a question: how to justify the legitimacy of *new poetry* as it discarded the strict form which had been, for a long time, the statue symbol of Chinese poetry?

It was under this circumstance that Fei Ming gradually formed his poetic theory, which was discretely explained in or inferred from his essays, letters, fiction, and was finally gathered in the collective handouts for his lecture "Modern Literature and Art" in Peking University around the 1930s. From an ontological point of view, Fei Ming argued that *new poetry* should not be attached

with much sociopolitical significance since it is, in its very nature, a genre of literature—a variant of Chinese poetry that suits the vernacular language of the modern era (Fei Ming, 2009c, p. 1279). This perception accommodated *new poetry* with classical poetry by acknowledging both the continuity and divergence between them simultaneously. He then further claimed in his handouts that “...I found out a boundary line [between classical and modern poetry]. [That is] *new poetry* must have the content of poetry and the language of prose” (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1629). This, according to Xi Du, provided an answer to the most fundamental and immediate questions which Fei Ming’s contemporary poets were faced with: what is *new poetry* and how to write it (Xi Du, 2005, p. 383).

This assertion has rich implications. To begin with, the “content of poetry” must involve an intuitive feeling of the poet. Fei Ming declared that the success of a modern poem depends heavily on the poet’s initial inspiration. Specifically, a poet should write a poem only because he has an impulsive feeling to do so at the particular moment, before which no such feeling existed; and the poem is readily a success once this feeling arises (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1610). For example, Fei Ming perceived Hu Shi’s practice “On the Night of April 25<sup>th</sup> 四月二十五夜作” as a genuine modern poem for it was composed with an immediate feeling, but not for its different form from tradition (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1612). Accordingly, many classical poems are not modern, not for their old forms, but because they serve either as a didactic media, which overshadows the poet’s emotion and sometimes is even posturing or as an outlet of metaphysical sentiments expressed in grandiloquent rhetoric (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1609). For instance, Fei Ming considered some works of Ma Zhiyuan<sup>i</sup> and Xin Qiji<sup>ii</sup> “worthless” (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1634), albeit their poems were highly appreciated by Hu Shi. Of course, such comment is subjective and somewhat extreme; nevertheless, it cuts a slit for us to peek into his poetic aesthetics and preferences. In short, Fei Ming’s criterion of intuitive feeling essentially requires two qualities of modern poetry, genuineness and personality, without which any poetic creation, regardless of modern or ancient, is simply what he called Diaozi 调子(tune)<sup>iii</sup>.

Fei Ming further delineated that modern poetry should be about the thinking and feelings of people living in the modern era. In his commentary on Zhou Zuoren’s poem “Little River 小河”, Fei Ming attributed its popularity to its “strangely novel content” which is both ordinary and modern (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1696). In this poem, Zhou “took a radical departure from the descriptive disposition of traditional poetry by introducing an element of storytelling [with a] primarily European literary device, anthropomorphism” (Bi, 2012). The image of the river was not scarce in classical literature, yet, the implied intention and the reflected human characteristics were rather fresh. In recognizing Zhou’s achievement, Fei Ming added that it was Zhou’s modern point of departure in his observation process that marked the new horizon of *new poetry*, which truly freed itself from what was inherited from traditional poetry (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1689).

Regarding the language or style, classical Chinese poetry is following the traditional Chinese literary device, *xing* 兴, which describes a nebulous feeling conveyed in a circuitous manner. “Throughout the entire classical tradition of Chinese poetry... *xing* has been designated not only as a poetic catalyst during the creative process, and an aesthetic effect beyond the confines of the poetic medium, but the very soul and essence of a poem” (Sun, 2006). However, as noted by Yeh, “having renounced the canonical tradition of Chinese poetry, modern poets were

seeking a new medium for fresh poetic expression and often looked for models in folk songs and, more so, in foreign literature" (Yeh, 1987, p. 33). In this background, Fei Ming analogizes the intertwine of sentiments and words in most classical Chinese poems to the branches and leaves, which together project an atmosphere of sense that is implicative and ambiguous (Fei Ming, *On New Poetry*, 2009, p. 1614). Note that it was not the abstractness or vagueness of classical poetry which Fei Ming opposed, instead, he argues that they had been misplaced in the form of poetry and could have been better conveyed through the form of prose (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1610). Many of Fei Ming's poetic practices were also imbued with the obscure atmosphere created by his jumping narrative which, according to Jiang Chengyu, induces his readers to participate and actively feel the sense of beauty (Jiang, 1989). In this sense, Fei Ming's proposal of the "language of prose" was not only consistent with the movement of colloquialism, on which almost all modern Chinese poets eventually came to consensus around the 1930s, but more importantly, it legitimized colloquialism as a better media to deliver the complete and intuitive feelings of the poet.

Fei Ming's "language of prose" requires a prosaic narrative style with free syntax and vernacular expression, which come naturally as a result of the need for more direct and individual narration in modern poetry. Compared with traditional poetry which imposes strict rules, the genre of prose emphasizes less on the economic use of diction and syntax and has fewer restrictions on format, so poets may directly concentrate on the writing object itself and better exploit their individualities. Fei Ming interpreted this as "writing in the sentence of prose" (Fei Ming, *On New Poetry*, 2009, p. 1645) and claimed that "China's new colloquial poems are intended for reading instead of viewing like a picture" (Fei Ming, *On New Poetry*, 2009, p. 1646). In this regard, Fei Ming originally shared a similar position as Hu Shi that *new poetry* should use the form of free verse, as is apparent from the third chapter of his "On New Poetry" titled "New Poetry Should be Free Verse" (Fei Ming, *On New Poetry*, 2009, p. 1622). However, just as the form of regulated verse was a constraint for traditional poetry, the mandatory form of the free verse could likewise establish yet another boundary in the other extreme. Upon realizing this incompatibility and being inspired by Feng Zhi's "Sonnets", Fei Ming then further revised his position on modern poetic form as that modern poetry can take any form as long as it is consistent with its content, and it is only for this reason that the free verse is better suited for *new poetry* (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1805). This ontological point of view allowed Fei Ming to free modern Chinese poetry from all possible restrictions and extricate his poetic practices from the sociopolitical ends embraced by many revolutionists, leading to his further achievements in poeticizing the sense of universal beauty which is not confined to a specific time or era.

### 3. Reconciliation between Chinese tradition and Western modern

Perhaps whatever occurred to Chinese poetry from the late 1910s was just a microcosm of the broader picture—the Chinese New Culture movement—which was essentially a sociopolitical eruption of intellectuals' suppressed and desperate responses to the declining popularity of the Chinese traditional culture confronted with an overwhelming influx of Western modern superiority. In searching for "New Culture", most of Fei Ming's contemporaries resorted to external sources, i.e., taking inspiration from Western/Foreign modern literature and culture, in the hope of

establishing a new set of aesthetics while breaking the long-lasting dominance of the literary tradition of feudal China. For instance, Mu Mutian and Li Jinfa were deeply influenced by Western symbolist poetry in their early poetic practices (Qian et al., 2010, p. 106). Bin Xin and Zong Baihua drew their inspirations from Japanese Haiku and Debendranath Tagore's *Stray Birds* and experimented on light poems by delivering philosophical thinking in a rather condensed length (Qian et al., 2010, p. 98). And the *Jingpai* Literary School, to which Fei Ming belonged, practised what Shih Shu-mei called "mutual implication", which "is one of how *Jingpai* writers negotiated their aesthetics, an aesthetics which subverted binary and essentialist conception of cultural difference" (Shih, 2001, p. 190).

However, Fei Ming was significant in the making of Chinese modern literature in that he managed to seamlessly reconcile modernism with traditionalism not only on the technical level but also on the spiritual and even religious levels. As a poet and critic, he held abundant tenets of Western modernism, including those of symbolism and imagism; yet, his poems contain rich elements of Chinese literary traditions, including the poetry of the late-Tang Dynasty, essays of the Six-Dynasty, as well as classical literary, Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucius thoughts. Compared to his peer literati who also balanced between modernism and traditionalism, Fei Ming's uniqueness lies in that "his point of departure was aimed at the tradition rather than the West" (Zhang, 2008, p. 149). As an English major graduate, Fei Ming was no stranger to Western literary works and theories, yet, the direction he took was not to imitate directly, which would render modern Chinese literature a replica of its Western counterpart, but to update and upgrade the traditional literature and adapt it to the modern era. To Fei Ming, all that imported merely functioned as a kaleidoscope through which he perceived the outside world and took inspiration in forming his taste of aesthetics.

In 1934, Fei Ming enjoyed his climax of poem composing, producing a total of 120 pieces of modern poems<sup>iv</sup>, among which the most representative one might be the "Mirror":

I ride on a general's battle horse, entering the peach garden by accident.  
 "A girl washes flowers in the river, dye the white cloud colored",  
 I am amazed that this is a good clean mirror?  
 Stop the horse, more amazed at the stillness of its shadow,  
 The girl's innocent eyes admire the beauty of this horse,  
 The man on the horseback  
 Reminds the whole life  
 Sweat streaming down the back,  
 The innocent horse also killed people—

Since I picked up a good clean mirror in my dream,  
 Now I knew that I do have a dauntless spirit,  
 I smile (realizing that) I cannot give this mirror to that girl,  
 Always here alone seeing her cleanness.<sup>v</sup>  
 我骑着将军战马误入桃花源，  
 “溪女洗花染白云”，  
 我惊于这是一面好明镜？

驻马更惊我的马影静，  
 女儿善看这一匹马好看，  
 马上之人  
 唤起一生  
 汗流浹背，  
 马虽无罪亦杀人， --

自从梦中我拾得一面好明镜，  
 如今我晓得我是真有一副大无畏精神，  
 我微笑我不能将此镜赠彼女儿，  
 常常一个人在这里头见伊的明净。 (Fei, 2009)

Here, Fei Ming employed an exquisite manipulation of realistic and illusive images and feelings to deliver a temporally-spatially variable mirage with the “good clean mirror”. This, undoubtedly, confuses many readers at the first glance but amazes the rest who see through the tricks he planted to toggle between reality and illusion. Recognizing that the seemingly out-of-place question mark at the end of line three serves as a break to the narrative thread, it forces the switching of the view angle between “I” and “the girl”. While we are still appreciating this imaginary story setting, the second stanza opens yet a third spatiotemporal dimension, the dream, and turns the whole poem into a phantasmagoria of three entangled time rings, each one of which encompasses a slice of the poet’s imagination and sentiment of a specific moment or period.

The jump across different time loops, which frequently appears in Fei Ming’s literary works in various forms, manifests that his perception of time was consistent with the modernist view that time is no longer preserved as “an arrow aiming straight into the future, [instead, it] became jumbled and fragmented, pushed and pulled in all directions” (Paddy, 2009, p. 124). The temporal and spatial variabilities in Fei Ming’s perception of reality coincide with Western modernists’ inward turning, which occurred as their response to the crisis of representation under the impacts of modern scientific, technological, philosophical, and psychological developments. On the other hand, as an amateur of Buddhism, Fei Ming’s mindset of reality was also influenced by the Buddhist sutra that emphasizes a person’s inner harmony, which is also a typical feature belonging to classical Chinese poetry. Thus, Fei Ming’s representation of reality, which focuses more on the inner world of the poet, including his imagination and dream, instead of the emotional or didactic expressions arising from exterior experiences or activities, could result from the synergetic influence of both Western modernism and Chinese tradition.

In “Mirror”, Fei Ming also borrowed from ancient Chinese literature several poetic images and allusions, such as “general’s battle horse”, “peach garden”, as well as the quoted verse from Li He’s poem. This adaptation of traditional literary elements that are familiar to readers, to some extent, fits with T. S. Eliot’s idea of “objective correlative”, which Eliot believed to be “the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art” (Eliot, 1948, p. 145). In his discussion of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Eliot proposed objective correlative as “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (Eliot, 1948,

p. 145). In Eliot's view, one needs to set a proper scene to resonate with his readers or audience; and Fei Ming's use of elements from classical Chinese poetry served the same purpose of preparing familiar scenes to trigger particular sentiments. Interestingly, as a quasi-Buddhist, Fei Ming has included a few Christian terms, such as God, Adam, Jesus, in his poems; however, he has never used their Chinese counterparts like Buddha, Sakyamuni, or simply Shen 神 which frequently appeared in ancient Chinese literature. Regardless of the motivation, his introduction of Western religious terms did add one more touch of freshness to his poems.

Fei Ming's adaptation of traditional literary elements was probably at a more evolved stage than objective correlative, as he constantly juxtaposed or combined contrasting poetic images or allusions in his poetic writing, which strikes as a pebble impacting a still water surface; and the ripples that follow would rapidly expand the dimensions of readers' imaginations, offering a resounding and refreshing experience. In "Mirror", such a combination was formed between the "general's battle horse", which is a classic image of military-themed poems, and the "peach garden"<sup>vi</sup>, an allusion created by Tao Yuanming to depict a utopian-like peaceful land away from the real world; it readily causes a tension—anxiety and concern whether the peaceful land would be jeopardized by the battle horse. For another example, in his poem "Clothes of Universe", the poet associated the light of a lamp and its shadows with the "clothes of the universe" to deliver an image and emotion of "loneliness of human being", which is hard to perceive at the first glance. Yet, by directly inserting two famous lines from "A Traveller's Song" 游子吟, written by the poet Meng Jiao of Tang Dynasty, Fei Ming managed to ring the bell and evoke the readers' empathy for the away-from-home traveller whose clothes were sewed by his considerate mother, the images of which immediately lead readers to click with the loneliness of human being in the broader context of the universe.

The coexistence of traditional and modern writings in Fei Ming's works renders a unique sense of aesthetics, which is multi-dimensional, inclusive, and dynamic (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1640) with a tone of pastiche. Li Jianwu, who analogized Fei Ming to an "enigmatic island" in the river of modern Chinese literary history, pointed out his frequent uses of long inspiring "blank" between his narrative lines (Li, 1998, p. 133), which in a sense reflects Fei Ming's exquisite adaptation of the classic Chinese aesthetics technique "liubai"<sup>vii</sup>. Jiang Chengyu also praised Fei Ming's "blank" as "an attractive highlight" (Jiang, 1989, p. 220) and further interpreted it as "emerging abruptly (*qi de tu wu*) and jumping without reasoning (*wu duan lai qu*)" (Jiang, 1989, p. 229). Yet, among others, Jiang criticized Fei Ming's poems to be obscure that the lack of necessary "thinking process" or "logical structure" makes it difficult to communicate with readers (Jiang, 1989, p. 231). Fei Ming of course was aware of the criticism of him for being over obscure; nevertheless, he dismissed it and simply argued that he had opened up his "heart" in his works and cannot be more clear (Fei Ming, 2009a, p. 1153). Although he did not justify himself with more explanations, his "blank" or "obscure" poetic writing did come from both conscious and unconscious origins which are worthy to be examined in further detail.

The conscious part could perhaps link with the deliberate applications of fragmentation and free association, which are common in Fei Ming's fictional writings and poems. In Western modernist literature, the implantation of fragmentation including the jump of inner consciousness, which is to disturb the narrative continuity, makes "one of the calling cards of the modernist



movement, a recognizable, sometimes enigmatic means of creating impact and communicating messages, a device that disturbed conventional notions of time and space in literary expression and corresponded to a new sense of the universe that began to emerge as the nineteenth century ended" (Tytell, 1981). Fei Ming's affinity for free association was apparent from his appreciation of the poems of Wen Tingyun, an ancient Chinese poet, saying that "every word in every line, every line in every piece, is independent fantasy instead of coherent writing, [it could] rise to the sky or fall to the ground (*shang tian ru di*), jump around to the east or to the west (*dong tiao xi tiao*), but the words and expressions all flow naturally ... the content expressed in Wen's poems can not be delivered by any poetic form prior to him" (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1640). In Fei Ming's view, Wen's use of free association allowed the faithful expression of the poet's imagination or thought flow, and this should be a key feature shared by *new poetry* (Fei Ming, On New Poetry, 2009, p. 1633).

Meanwhile, Fei Ming's subconscious was largely influenced by Buddhist thinking on life and dream. On carefully scrutinizing the idea of ālayavijñāna, Liu Haoming suggested that the blurry boundary between living and dreaming in Fei Ming's works can be attributed to his conversion to Buddhism, given that "both life and dream can be regarded as realizations of ālayavijñāna because both are its transformations" (Liu, 2001, p. 50). This Buddhist mentality distinguishes Fei Ming from Bian Zhilin, who was another modernist poet with a similar reputation of being obscure. Accordingly to Wang Zelong, Bian imposed his philosophical thinking of relativity, whereas Fei Ming absorbed ideas from Buddhism or Zen (Wang Z., 1993, p. 54). In Bian's poems, e.g., his famous "Fragment 断章", the shifting perspective between "you" who "take in the view from the bridge" and the "sightseer" who "watches you from the balcony" (Bian, 2002) was the key to grasp the poet's thoughts. In Fei Ming's writing, however, the shifting is often between reality and fantasy, as there was no partition between life and dream in his mind. Again, taking "Mirror" for example, to Fei Ming, the world inside the mirror was not merely a physical reflection; moreover, it was an inner imaginary world extended from the outer real world. In this sense, Fei Ming's comment of Wen Tingyun's poem being "stereoscopic" (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1641) could also apply to his poetic creation, where multiple worlds coexist both in reality and the poet's mind.

#### 4. Conclusion: the pursuit of completeness

In both literary practices and aesthetics, Fei Ming has constantly stressed the idea of "completeness", e.g., the inherent and eternal beauty of the completeness of life in his outstanding novel *Bridge* (Wang F., 2020, p. 29). In poetry, he also valued the beauty of completeness as a key property of modern poems. To him, Liu Bannong's "Strong Wind 大风" was a good poem because the poet had "a complete feeling" (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1660), and many of Bing Xin's short poems were "the most complete" works (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1739). And he was also proud of his own poems' completeness, even though he humbly claimed himself as an "unprofessional poet" (Fei Ming, 2009b, p. 1821). Interestingly, while Fei Ming's literary works are interspersed with his idea of completeness, he never gave a clear and accurate definition for it. Nonetheless, through his poetic creations and aesthetics, one may interpret the complete feeling as an original sensation that guarantees the genuineness, pureness, and spontaneity of the poet's inspiration. On the other

hand, his completeness in the scope of general literature mainly requires a straightforward narrative that is free from words, phrases, or circumlocutions which are florid but empty.

Coincidentally, Fei Ming's mentality of "completeness" shared similar key spirits with his Western counterparts. Through the complete feeling of poetry, one may find his fascination with intuitive sentiment resembling Henri Bergson's theory of intuition; however, Fei Ming's idea was likely triggered by his study on ālayavijñāna, whereas Bergson's was built upon the ideal genesis of the intelligence. Fei Ming's preference for straightforwardness also showed up in Pound's famous "Don'ts" in which he asked "the direct treatment" of the writing object while using "absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation" (Childs, 2017, p. 104). Furthermore, as spotted by Zhu Guangqian, remarkable similarities can be found between Fei Ming's novel *Bridge* 桥 and the stream-of-consciousness writings of Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust, even though Fei Ming had not read those writers' works before his creation (Zhu, 1937).

These coincidences manifest Fei Ming's unique contributions to the making of modern Chinese literature that, by screening and absorbing the essences of both modern and traditional literary works as well as culture, his modern aesthetic ideas and practices have evolved into a separate system that parallels those of the West, yet with classical Chinese elements. Unlike many of his peers, his ontological approach enabled him to treat classical Chinese poetry without prejudice and diminished the rupture between tradition and modernity with the proposal that modern poetry should take the content of poetry and language of prose. Further, his "completeness" mentality on literature allowed him to explore Chinese poetry of true modernity without falling into the Euro-centric trap in world literature. In this sense, as a refreshing locality of global modernism, the poetic practices and theories of Fei Ming could help to spare modern Chinese literature from the presumption that it was merely a reproductive copy of Western modern literature.

### Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest.

### Funding

No funding has been received for the publication of this article. It is published free of any charge.

### Endnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> Ma Zhiyuan (about 1250-1321) was a writer of Yuan Dynasty. The work Fei Ming referred to here was "Tune: Sunny Sand Autumn Thoughts 天净沙·秋思".

<sup>ii</sup> Xin Qiji (1140-1207) was a famous poet of Song Dynasty. The work Fei Ming referred to here was "Water Dragon's Chant 水龙吟·登建康赏心亭"

<sup>iii</sup> Fei Ming has used this word to describe classical Chinese poetry, *ci*, and *qu* without concrete content many times in his collective handout "On New Poetry".

<sup>iv</sup> This record can be found in Fei Ming's essay "Tianma Shiji 天马诗集" in *Fei Ming Ji* edited by Wang Feng.

<sup>v</sup> This English version is translated by the author of this paper for the reader's convenient reference.

<sup>vi</sup> The literary allusion of the Peach Garden was created by Tao Yuanming (365-472) from Eastern Jin Dynasty. In his work "The Peach Colony", he depicted a mystery wonderland where villagers are living a happy and contented life without knowing anything happened outside this Peach Garden.

<sup>vii</sup> "Liubai" is an artistic technique of ancient Chinese arts. Originally, it means intentionally leaving blank area or negative space in the painting. This technique has also been widely applied to Chinese literature.

## References

- Bi, L. (2012). Zhou Zuoren's Vernacular Poetry and His Cult of Childhood. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 5(2), 57-62.
- Bian, Z. (2002). Fragment 断章. In Z. Bian, *Bian Zhilin Wenji* 卞之琳文集 (p. 128). Hefei: Anhui Education Press.
- Childs, P. (2017). *Modernism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Crespi, J. A. (2016). Form and Reform: New Poetry and the Crescent Moon Society. In K. A. Denton, *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature* (pp. 121-127). New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.
- Eliot, T. S. (1948). *Selected Essays by T. S. Eliot*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.
- Fei Ming. (2009a). On Dream. In F. Wang, *Fei Ming Ji* (Vol. 3, pp. 1151-1159). Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Fei Ming. (2009b). On New Poetry. In F. Wang, *Fei Ming Ji* (Vol. 6, pp. 1605-1821). Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Fei Ming. (2009c). Preface for Zhou Zuoren's Prose Collection. In F. Wang, *Fei Ming Ji* (Vol. 3, pp. 1274-1280). Beijing: Peking University.
- Fei Ming. (2009d). The Mirror. In F. Wang, *Fei Ming Ji* (Vol. 3, pp. 1533-1534). Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Jiang, C. (1989). Fei Ming Shige Jiedu 废名诗歌解读. *Modern Chinese Literature Studies*, 219-231.
- Li, J. (1998). Hua Meng Lu. In H. Guo, *Collection of Li Jianwu's Critiques* (pp. 131-141). Zhuhai: Zhuhai Publication.
- Liu, H. (2001). Fei Ming's Poetics of Representation: Dream, Fantasy, Illusion and Ālayavijñāna. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 30-71.
- Paddy, D. I. (2009). Key Critical Concepts and Topics. In P. Tew, & A. Murray, *The Modernism Handbook* (pp. 112-134). London, New York: Continuum.
- Qian, L., Wen, R., & Wu, F. (2010). *The First Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Shih, S. (2001). *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Sun, C.-c. (2006). Mimesis and Xing, Two Modes of Viewing Reality: Comparing English and Chinese Poetry. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 43(3), 326-354.
- Tytell, J. (1981). *Epiphany in Chaos: Fragmentation in Modernism*. In L. D. Krizman, *Fragoments: Incompletion and Discontinuity*. New York: New York Literary Forum.

- 
- Wang, F. (2020). A Comparative Study of Stream of Consciousness: Fei Ming and Virginia Woolf. In K. Chan, & C. G. Lau, *Chinese Culture in the 21st Century and its Global Dimensions* (pp. 17-30). Singapore: Springer.
- Wang, Z. (1993). Fei Ming de Shi yu Chan 废名的诗与禅. *Jiangnan Tribune*, 54-58.
- Wu, X. (1997). Xiandai Shihua Xiaoshuo Tansuo. *Literary Review*(1), 118-127.
- Xi Du. (2005). What Is New Poetry? In Xi Du, *Mingjia Du Xinshi* (pp. 382-412). Beijing: China Planning Press.
- Yeh, M. (1987). Emergence of a Form in Modern Chinese Poetry. *Modern Chinese Literature*, 3(1/2), 33-46.
- Yeh, M. (1991). *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice Since 1917*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.
- Zhang, J. (2008). Lun Fei Ming Shige Guannian de Chuantong yu Xiandai. *Journal of Nanjing Normal University*, 148-154.
- Zhu, G. (1937). Bridge. *Literature Magazine*, 1(3), 183-189.
- 

Candy Fan Wang is currently working as a lecturer in the Foreign Languages College of Shanghai Normal University. Her research interests include global modernism, comparative literature, and Chinese modern and contemporary literature. So far, she has already published one peer-reviewed academic article, which is included in *Chinese Culture in the 21st Century and its Global Dimensions* by Springer.

---