

“Black” in Langston Hughes’ and Gidi Majia’s poems

Lina Mi

Southwest Minzu University, Chengdu Sichuan China

Email: 873508901@qq.com

Keywords: Langston Hughes; Gidi Majia; Black; Image; Poetry

Abstract: Langston Hughes and Gidi Majia have mentioned the color "black" many times in their poems. Because of the difference of culture, history and national psychology, the word "black" provided by the two men in their poems represents the same color but its images are not identical. Based on the above, this paper will compare and analyze the similarities and differences of the image of "black" in the poems of the two poets.

1. Introduction

Poetry is one of the most intelligent and beautiful languages of mankind. In poetry, we can not only read beautiful scene, but also see the history of a nation and hear the voice of a nation. There are two poets in the world who have no intersection in space and have only a few overlaps in time. But in their poems we can all hear their deep love for their homelands. They are the famous black poet Langston Hughes and the famous Chinese Yi poet Gidi Majia. This paper will compare and analyze the similarities and differences of their poems through the color word black, so as to find out the reasons for that due to different culture, history and national psychology

2. On Image and Color

Image is the basic symbol of poetry and also a way for poets to express a certain meaning through certain things. Images often conveys the feelings the poet wants to express. "Image", as the most basic aesthetic unit of poetry appreciation, can be said to grasp it, also grasp the artistic conception, style and the author's thoughts and feelings.[1] For example, reading "On a quiet night,/ I saw the moonlight before my couch,/ and wondered if it were not the frost on the ground,/ I raised my head and looked out on the mountain moon,/ I bowed my head and thought of my far-off home" we may have seen the poet in the bright moon missing his homeland. It can be said that the image in poetry determines its overall style and characteristics. The understanding and grasp of poetic images enable us to understand the basic features of poetry more clearly from the perspective of micro poetics.[2] Image is the basic element of aesthetic activity in reading poetry. The so-called image is the artistic object created by poet through his unique emotional activities. Image is an important poetics concept. Ezra Pound, the founder of imagism said: "Imagery is the mixture of the moment between reason and emotion. This sudden state of intermingling creates a sense of freedom, free from space and time, and also a sense of openness, ease of mind and energy, when in front of some greatest works of art.[3] Zhifang Xia, a Chinese scholar, thinks: "In the fusion of meaning and image, it is by no means a simple addition of the two, but "meaning" (subject) has always occupied a dominant position. Because of this, that makes the image above the general cognitive appearance and memory appearance and become something with new quality, and achieve the brilliant achievement of creative imagination." Whether Ezra or Zhifang Xia expressed the characteristics of the image, that is: the image in poetry is not an image in the general sense, but a "sense of freedom" and "creativity" formed by the poet because of his "subjective role" and imagination.[4] The use of image is the embodiment of the deep meaning in a poetry. To measure a poet's achievements, a major standard is whether he has created fresh and different images.[5] It is precisely because the image has such an important role, so the poet will not express the image in

poetry at will, but through its subjective choice. He will choose those images that can express his emotions to express the artistic conception and ideas he wants. This choice is often unique. This uniqueness lies in the poet's choice of words through the transformation of its internal meaning system and then change their conventional meaning, so as to give new meanings to words. The poet's temperament, style, and the high level of poetic text are the different expressions of the poet's capture and combination of words.[6] These images, endowed with new ideas, enable readers to feel the poet's inner thoughts and intentions clearly, and realize the poet's feelings and poetic meaning.

Although both Langston Hughes and Gidi Majia have chosen and applied the image of "black" in their poems, their definitions of this word and their understandings of the image of "black" are not identical because of their different culture, history and national psychology. Black is no longer a simple color word in their poetry, but something that the poet has given new meaning because of his "subjective role" and imagination. Image is an ancient aesthetic concept and the most basic aesthetic element in appreciating poetry. It can be said that grasping the image means to grasp the author's emotion and enters the artistic conception created by the author in poetry. Lewis (C.DayLewis) believes that any poetic image contains some kind of sensory basis. He also gave specific examples of images (Image) that contain "vision, hearing, smell, touch "[7] Color words have rich connotations. They express the rich and colorful inner world and feelings of the author in any language. In the creation of poetry, the light and shade of color and people's feeling about cold and heat aroused by color are the most likely to touch the poet's heart and then stimulate the poet's association and imagination. For example, blue makes people feel melancholy, purple makes people feel noble, red makes people warm, white stands for purity, green is hope for people, gray means sad.

Colorologists believe:" Color is emotional and expressive, each color can arouse different emotions. This is the human life experience and their universal sensibility from ancient times .[8]

In the vast world of poetic images, different color words such as blue, purple, gray and white express the poet's different emotions and mental state, and become the carrier of the poet's inner idea. Reader will also realize the undercurrent of the poet's inner heart from these different colors. When we read the poems of Langston Hughes and Gidi Majia, we can touch the undercurrent of the poet's heart according to the composition and change of the image conveyed by color, and then enter into the artistic conception created by poetry, which leads readers to obtain more perceptual knowledge and aesthetic cognition about the connotation and emotion in poetry. Both Langston Hughes and Gidi Majia use the color word "black "in their poems, but it is not the same to appreciate them carefully.

3. Comparison of the "Black" Images in Langston Hughes and Gidi Majia 's Poetry

In the history of American literature, Langston Hughes is an extremely important figure, and the famous poet who came to the fore in the Harlem Renaissance Movement in the 1920s, used his poems containing national feelings to become the spokesman of the ordinary black people in the united states. In this historical and cultural context, most of the verses we read in Hughes' poems represent the voices of black people. Hughes tried to awaken his black fellows through his affectionate verse. It's not difficult to understand that as a black man, Hughes used word "black" many times in his poems. Similarly, It's also not difficult to know that Gidi Majia, who grew up in Daliangshan and is the descendant of Yi people who gestate the three-color culture of red, yellow and black wrote word "black" in his poems many times. When readers read "As I Grown older ", "Dream variation ", " The Negro speaks of Rivers "by Hughes and "The Color of Nuosu", "Black Rivers", "Rhapsody In Black" by Gidi Majia, They feel the image given by the authors for "Black ". It must be more than a linguistic coincidence that so much "black" appear in Hughes and Gidi Majia 's poetry.

Black people are the people forced to come to the American continent. Since the first black slaves were brought to the American continent in 1619, black people have begun their sad history in this land. Everything black is considered inferior in the cultural context dominated by white people.

Black people are considered to be "ugly and inferior to white races, an uncultivated, grotesque, animal-like group [9]". Such a creed was accepted not only by whites but also by some blacks themselves in the cultural context dominated by white people. Black people were at the bottom of the biological chain. They were goods that can be bought and sold at will, without freedom, dignity and rights. Black people's own traditional culture has also been obliterated, and their national consciousness and ethnic identity have been faded in the strength of white culture. As a black poet, the strong sense of national responsibility made Hughes think and pay attention to the fate of his nation from beginning to end. Hughes realized that only by arousing the national consciousness and national pride of black people could they change their low status in society. In Hughes' eyes, the culture bred by black people is beautiful, the dark complexion is beautiful, and the heart of black people is beautiful. But only let all black people who grow up in this land realize the beauty of the black nation, can they improve their self-confidence and fearlessly face all the ups and downs and suffering. The famous poem "Black and Beautiful " shows us the beauty of the black skin in Hughes's eyes —— This cry-out claim has also become a source of power for black people, and countless black people at the bottom of society have gained infinite confidence because of this simple compound sentence. "Black and beautiful" has also provided great inspiration to countless black people in slums. This is the best evaluation and interpretation of black by Hughes, but also the highest praise of Negritude ". And in "*Negro* ", Hughes, in his role as the voice of the black nation, makes a decisive claim:

I'm a Negro
Black as the night is black,
Black as the depths of my Africa.

Readers heard this voice in most of Hughes' poems, calm and confident. "I'm a Negro, black as the night is black," black here has become the world's most beautiful color, shining with dazzling brilliance. And in another poem, *My People*, Hughes is equally proud to celebrate the virtues of the black nation:

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people;
The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people;
Beautiful, also, is the sun
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

Simple language simple sentence structure but let us realize that Hughes as a black people directly and clearly equate "black" with the pride of beauty. Like stars and the sun "black" has an eternal beauty.

Giddimaga, grown up in the three-color culture of Yi people, still believes that red is the fire culture, symbolizing sanctity and glory; yellow is the spiritual culture, symbolizing kindness, nobility and morality, black is the iron culture, representing tenacity and strength. His poem "*The Colors in the Yi People's Dreams*" reflects the three-color culture that Gidi Majia adheres to:

With tears full of deep feeling
I have dreamed those colors
I dreamed black
I have dreamed the black felt overcoat were raised highly
The black sacrificial offerings alone went towards forefather's souls
The black heroic knot is covered with the eternal stars
But I know clearly
From which day on this sweet and sad race
Began to title itself Nuosu

The black felt overcoats, the black sacrifice offerings, and the black heroic knot in this poem are all endowed with national character by Gidi Majia. The black color in the poem reflects the character of strength and perseverance among NuoSu. In addition to the pride expressed in "*Negro* ", Hughes gave the sad image of "black "in his poetry. As outcomers forced to come to America,

black People are considered "ugly and inferior to white races. It's an uncultivated animal, without culture, without status, not to mention beauty. Under the strong domination of white culture, black people became the object of slavery, discrimination and domination. For a long time this thought was the mainstream among American. The black people, in despair and even numbly, accepted all the discrimination imposed on them. Therefore, in Hughes's poetry "*Negro*" There is a sadness due to the responsibility to awaken the black people to be pride. So in Hughes's poem "*As I Grow Older*" we read:

It was a long time ago
I have almost forgotten my dream
But it was there then
In front of my
Bright like a sun —
My dream
And then the wall rose
Rose slowly,
slowly
Between me and my dreams
Rose until it touched the sky-
The wall.
Shadow
No longer the light of my dream before me,
Above me,
Only the thick wall
Only the shadow,
My hands
My dark hands!
Break through the wall
Find my dream!
Help me to shatter this darkness
To smash this night,
To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!

In the poem "black" becomes the reason why the wall rises and obscures the light. Black became the source of shadows for black people. Black became a barrier to dreams. But the poet wants to use his unchangeable hands, black and dark hands to break the black wall. This sad spirit expresses Hughes' duty to awaken his fellows.

As the son of Yi people, Gidi Majia inherits the culture of his ancestors, and persistently protect the spiritual home left by his ancestors. Gidi Majia, as the pioneer of contemporary Yi poetry, are quite different from those of his predecessors. The famous poet Liu Shahe believes that his forefathers wrote "what I see ", and focused on" the induction of life experience ",and "the exhibition of complex phenomenon ";While Gidi Majia wrote "what I think ", using his poems"to show the depth of the soul ", " the reproduction of the spiritual world ".[10]So it is easy to touch the poet's deep soul by reading Gidi Majia 's poems. Reading the word black in the poet's poems is also easy to show us the deep melancholy. "This peaceful moment,/ O, the black dream,/please cover and shroud me quickly,/..."Let each of my words and songs become the true echo on the soul of this land,/ let each of my lines and punctuations, flow out of the blue vessels of this land,/ O,the black dream,/ when I am disappearing,/ please allow me to speak to a huge rock, ..." In this *Rhapsody In Black* we see the a deep, solemn image conveyed by word "black"

4. Conclusion

To sum up, Poet's feeling about color is the easiest way to trigger his aesthetic perception and imagination. We see the color word classified as cool in color division --" black "is endowed with national character in the poems of two poets in different regions -- Langston Hughes and Gidi Majia , but because of the difference of culture, history and national psychology, the " black "in Hughes' poems has a trace of sadness, bearing a responsibility to awaken the black people to be pride and self-confidence . And the "black" in Gidi Majia 's poetry is a little melancholy. By comparing the similarities and differences of the same color word in the poems of the two poets with similar style, we can feel more wonderful world caused by diversity and richness of different culture.

Acknowledgements

Supported by The Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities
Southwest Minzu University Project: The study of Yi poetry in English world
(No:2014SZYQN79)

References

- [1]. G.H. Liu. X.F. Wang. On the Cognitive Approach of poetic image construction: iconicity and metaphorical representation. (In Chinese). Foreign Language Education, (2010) Vol.31 No.3, p25
- [2]. Q.M.Tao. He Li Poetic Style Feature Theory —— Focusing on Image Research(in Chinese) .Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences Edition), (1999)No05,P.99
- [3]. S.S.Chen. Contemporary Poetics (In Chinese). Beijing: Social Sciences Literature Press ,(1998).p121
- [4]. Z. F. Xia. Literary Image Theory (In Chinese) Shantou University Press, (1993). p185
- [5]. Z. H. Sun. A theory on the scattered images of Gidi Majia's poetry (In Chinese) journal of XiChang normal college., (2001) No02, p.42
- [6]. Z.H.Sun. On the Language Style of Gidi Majia's Poetry. (In Chinese)Journal of Southwest Minzu University.(Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition),(2001) Vol .22 No .7 ,p98
- [7]. Z. M. Li. On the Construction of Image Theory in Poetry. (In Chinese).Journal of Chong Qing University (Social Science Edition),(2007)Vol.13 No.6 ,p97
- [8]. Y. Li. L.P. Li. A.M. Zhang. Color (In Chinese). Hubei Art Publishing House ,(2006) p.12
- [9]. L. X. Zhang. A Symbolic Meaning of White in American Literature and Culture (In Chinese). Foreign Literature Review, (2002) No.01, p.116
- [10]. M. Li. Deep Display of Yi Soul -- A Review of the Selected Poems of Gidi Majia (In Chinese) Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), (1993) No02, p.52