Inquiries and Confession before the Cross:  
An Interpretation of Wang Guilin’s My Jerusalem

Liu Yan, China, Institute for Trans-cultural Studies, Beijing International Studies University, Peking, China  
E-mail: liuyan@bisu.edu.cn
Περίληψη
Η εργασία αυτή χρησιμοποιεί την προσέγγιση της προσεκτικής ανάγνωσης για να ερμηνεύσει το έργο του σύγχρονου Κινέζου ποιητή Wang Guilin, Ιερουσαλήμ, από τη διαλογική προοπτική των «Εγώ και Εσύ». Το βιβλίο της ποίησης καταγράφει τα συναισθήματα του Wang κατά την επίσκεψή του στην Ιερουσαλήμ, με την ευκαιρία της συμμετοχής του στο 32ο Παγκόσμιο Συνέδριο Ποιητών που πραγματοποιήθηκε στο Τελ Αβίβ, στο Ισραήλ, από το ταξίδι στις 3 - 8 Σεπ 2012. Το ταξίδι του Wang στην Ιερουσαλήμ ήταν ένα προσκύνημα προς την αυτο-επίτευξη, την ειρήνη και την αγάπη, και την πνευματική πατρίδα.

Από τη σκοπιά της πίστης που πηγαίνει πέρα από την καθημερινή ζωή, το Wang σχετίζει πώς ένα άτομο που αντιμετωπίζει μοναδικές ιστορικές, πολιτιστικές, θρησκευτικές, γεωγραφικές, φυσικές και ιερείς σκηνές στην Ιερουσαλήμ, στη συνέχεια καταυθάνει σε ένα νεογέννητο. Η Ιερουσαλήμ απεικονίζει μια αντιπαράθεση και ένα διάλογο μεταξύ του «Εγώ» και της «Ιερουσαλήμ» στους Αγίους Τόπους. Αυτό σημαίνει ότι βιώνουμε και αισθάνομαστές μέσα από τα μάτια του "εγώ" (προσκυνητής ή ταξιδιώτης) σε μια άλλη πολιτιστική παράδοση. Η γερμανική εβραϊκή θεολόγος Martin Buber υποδεικνύει ότι η εκ νέου συγχώνευση της λαϊκότητας και της ιερότητας δείχνει μια σχέση και όχι μια οντότητα. Υπάρχει μια σύγκρουση, ένα διάλογο και μια διαπροσωπική υπέρβαση και όχι σε μια μοναδική εμπειρία της αυτο-εξέτασης και της κερδοσκοπίας. Για παράδειγμα, στη Γεσθημανή ο Wang εμφανίζει μια στενή σχέση μεταξύ του ανθρώπου και του Θεού στο διάλογο «του Εγώ-και-Εσύ». Αλλάζει ότι ως άτομο που επιδιώκει την αλήθεια, ο ποιητής ανοίγει ταρακολέα την εσωτερικότητα του και πλησίασε το Θεό με τρόπο ελκυστικό και κοιτώντας ψηλά αντί της λογικής ή των εικασιών.

Εάν η Αθήνα αντιπροσωπεύει ένα δρόμο της επιστήμης και της λογικής στρωμένης με τη γνώση, της σοφίας και της αυτο-παρουσίασης, τότε η Ιερουσαλήμ αντιπροσωπεύει ένα δρόμο του πνεύματος και της πίστης που χτίστηκε με αυταπάρνηση, θυσία, συμπάθεια, ταπείνωφροσύνη και φυλανθρωπία. Ο θεολόγος Lev Shestov πιστεύει ότι η ανθρώπινη γνώση δεν ελευθερώνει, αλλά περιορίζει τον άνθρωπο, ώστε οι αλήθειες που προβλέπονται από τη γνώση έχουν ηττηθεί από τον ανθρώπινο πόνο. Στη σειρά της η Ιερουσαλήμ μου, όλες οι βασικές εικόνες που εμφανίζονται συχνά έχουν σχέσεις με "δάκρυα". Προφανώς, o Wang ακολουθεί ένα δρόμο κλήσης και δακρύων.

Η Μέση Ανατολή σήμερα παραμένει τεταμένη και τυρβώδης. Είναι αυτό το μικρό μέρος όπου σκορπίζονται ιστορικές σκηνές, έθνη, βασικές εικόνες, ειδικά αντικείμενα και φυσικές σκηνές. Εκθέτοντας τον εαυτό του σε ένα τόσο περίπλοκο πλαίσιο, το "εγώ" που μεγάλωσε μέσα στις παραδόσεις του Κομφουκιανισμού, του Ταοϊσμού και του Βουδισμού, παταγω-1

1 My original paper was written in Chinese. The English version has been translated by Lin Zhenhua, who teaches at the Green Oasis School in Shenzhen, China. I want to express my gratitude for his patience, kindness and support. It was published in: Frontiers of Literary Studies in China (Beijing: Higher Education Press) Volume9.Number2. 2015. PP.318-336.
δώς έγινε μάρτυρας αυτού του ιερού τόπου όπου αναδείχθηκαν οι τρεις μεγάλες θρησκείες του κόσμου (του Ιουδαϊσμού, του Χριστιανισμού και του Ισλαμισμού) που υποφέρουν από ατελείωτους πολέμους. Για τον Wang, η πορεία προς την Ιερουσαλήμ είναι μια διαδικασία της αναγέννησης κατά τη διάρκεια της οποίας ο ίδιος τάσσεται υπέρ της ειρήνης και της αγάπης, και ξανά ανανεώθηκε τον εαυτό του και έφαξε για το πνευματικό σπίτι του.

Η έννοια του να ξαναμπεί στην Ιερουσαλήμ είναι ότι αυτό το ταξίδι ανοίγει μια θεϊκή διάσταση που συνεχίζεται πέρα από τον ορίζοντα (τον κοσμικό κόσμο) συναισθηματικά, ώστε να εμβαθύνει και να διευρύνει την ποιήση του σε μια επέκταση η οποία ποτέ δεν επιτεύχθηκε. Ως ποιητής με θρησκευτικά συναισθήματα, ο Wang λαμβάνει ένα βαθύ αίσθημα πίστεως προς την ανάμειξη με την προσωπική του εμπειρία με την άθλια ιστορία της Ιερουσαλήμ και την τραγική ζωή του Ιησού. Γνωρίζοντας ότι το πνεύμα του ήταν ελλιπές, ανεπαρκές και ένοχο, ο Wang ξεκίνησε ένα διάλογο με τον Θεό στη σχέση του «Εγώ και Εσύ», έτσι ώστε η νοοτροπία να μπορούσε να αναβιώσει και το πνεύμα να μεταλλαχθεί. Πρόκειται για μια ευγενή ποιότητα στάσης στη σύγχρονη Κίνα, στην οποία λείπει η πίστη και η αυτο‐αντανάκλαση. Η Ιερουσαλήμ μου επισημαίνει μια ειρηνική πορεία της λύτρωσης που οδηγεί στην πνευματική πατρίδα. Ίσως όλοι μας θα πρέπει να προηγήσουμε, κοιτώντας ψηλά τον πανάρρητο βωμό του σκοτώδους και να αναρωτηθούμε: «Πού είναι η Ιερουσαλήμ μου;»

**Abstract**

This paper employs the approach of close reading to interpret a contemporary Chinese poet Wang Guilin’s *My Jerusalem* from the dialogic perspective of “I and Thou”. The book of poetry records Wang’s feelings and emotions during his visit to Jerusalem on the occasion of attending the 32nd World Congress of Poets held in Tel Aviv, Israel from 3-8 September 2012. Wang’s journey to Jerusalem was also a pilgrimage toward self-achievement, peace and love, and the spiritual homeland.

From a perspective of faith which goes beyond daily life, Wang relates how an individual encountered unique historical, cultural, religious, geographical, natural and sacred scenes in Jerusalem, and then obtained a newborn. *My Jerusalem* depicts a confrontation and a dialogue between “I” and “Jerusalem” the Holy Land. That means to experience and feel through the eyes of the “I” (pilgrim or traveller) in another cultural tradition. The German Jewish theologian Martin Buber indicates that the re-fusion of secularity and sacredness demonstrates a relationship rather than an entity. It exists in an encounter, a dialogue and an interpersonal transcendence rather than in a solitary experience of self-examination and speculation. For example, Wang’s *Gethsémani* displays an intimate relationship between human and God in the “I‐and‐Thou” dialogue. It tells that as an individual pursuing truth, the poet opened bravely his inwardsness and approached God with a way of appealing and looking up instead of reasoning or speculating.

If Athens stands for a road of science and reason paved with knowledge, wisdom and self-presentation, then Jerusalem for a road of spirit and faith built with abnegation, sacrifice, sympathy, humbleness and philanthropy. The theologian Lev Shestov believes that human knowledge does not free but restrain human, that the truths provided by knowledge are vanquished by human suffering. In the series of *My Jerusalem*, all core images appeared frequently have relations with “tears”. Obviously, Wang is pursuing a path of calling and tears.

The Middle East today remains tense and turbulent. It is in this small place where scatter historical scenes, nations, core images, special objects and natural scenes. Exposing him-
Inquiries and Confession before the Cross: An Interpretation of Wang Guilin’s My Jerusalem

self in such a complicated context, the “I” who grew up within the traditions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism miserably witnessed this sacred place where emerged three major religions in the world (Judaism, Christianity and Islamism) suffering from endless wars. For Wang, the route to Jerusalem is a process of revival during which he advocates peace and love, re-recognized himself and searched for his spiritual home.

The meaning of reentering Jerusalem is that this journey opens a divine dimension which goes beyond the horizon (the secular world) vertically, that it deepens and broadens his poetry to an extension which was never achieved. As a poet with religious sentiments, Wang obtained a deep feeling toward faith through blending his personal experience with the miserable history of Jerusalem and the tragic life of Jesus. Having acknowledged that his spirit was incomplete, deficient and guilty, Wang started a dialogue with God in the relationship of “I and Thou” so that the mentality might be revived and the spirit converted. This is a noble quality rare in contemporary China where lacks faith and self-reflection. My Jerusalem points out a peaceful path of redemption leading to the spiritual homeland. Perhaps all of us should be calm down, looking up at the towering altar in the dark and asking ourselves: “where is my Jerusalem?”

He is a poet starting for Jerusalem from afar, a pious pilgrim and a spiritual interlocutor of “I and Thou.” Having arrived at the Holy Land, full of history and significance, he (she) lingers around the Gethsemani where Jesus was imprisoned, silently facing the huge cross on the Calvary, bursting into tears at the Wailing Wall. Even reentering Jerusalem was imbued with surprise, shock, compassion, melancholy, reflection, penitence... Inner trembling, spiritual inquiries, reminiscence, meditation and confession—all this constitutes the theme of Wang Guilin’s book of poetry, My Jerusalem (Wode Yelusaleng 我的耶路撒冷). In the epilogue, “Everyone Should Have an Inward Jerusalem” (每个人心里都要有一个耶路撒冷), Wang points out that “the purpose of this trip was to visit Jerusalem, to be a genuine pilgrim. I used to regard writing poems as my own religion; the way of writing, then being the pilgrimage. However, it was not until being baptized in Jerusalem that I experienced an unprecedentedly astonishment. It just felt like being hit by a thunderbolt and burned from inside.”

The book of poetry records Wang’s feelings and emotions during his visit to Jerusalem on the occasion of attending the 32nd World Congress of Poets held in Tel Aviv, Israel, from the 3rd to the 8th of September 2012. “We had been attracted by the atmosphere there insomuch that we paid another visit two days later, retracing the route on which Jesus trudged with the

2 Wang Guilin 王桂林 (1952–), a.k.a. Du Heng 杜衡, a poet from Shandong province. He is the denominator and initiator of the “poet tribe from the mouth of the Yellow River” (黄河口诗人部落) and editor of the journal the Poet Tribe from the Mouth of the Yellow River (Huanghekou Shiren Buluo 黄河口诗人部落). He has published some anthologies such as the Sea on the Grass (Caoye shangde hai 草叶上的海), Introspection and Expectation (Neixing yu yuanwu 内省与远骛) and My Jerusalem (Wode Yelusaleng 我的耶路撒冷) as well as a collection of essays, My Pool (Wode chitang 自己的池塘).

cross on his back. On that day, every visitor was double shocked and baptized both physically and mentally. As a tourist from China visiting an occidental country with a long tradition of pilgrimage, and as a contemporary poet striving to write poems even after the many vicissitudes of life, Wang could not help but burst into tears and compose twelve religious poems dedicated to Jerusalem. These include *Jerusalem* (*耶路撒冷*), *Israel* (*以色列*), *Pray* (*祷告*), *The Mediterranean Sunshine* (*地中海的阳光*), *Gethsêmani* (*客西马尼园*), *I Am* (*我是*), *Reentering Jerusalem* (*重返耶路撒冷*), *Harp* (*竖琴*), *Wailing Wall* (*哭墙*), *Tonight* (*今夜*), *Salt of the Dead Sea* (*死海之盐*), and *You are Right There* (*你在那里*). From a perspective of faith that transcends daily life, he illustrates how an individual encounters unique historical, cultural, religious, geographical, natural and sacred scenes in Jerusalem, and then is reborn. For Wang, the route to Jerusalem is a process of revival during which he advocates peace and love, recognizes himself, and searches for his spiritual home.

I. Meditations in Jerusalem: Light and Shade

Just as its title implies, *My Jerusalem* depicts a confrontation and a dialogue between “I” and “Jerusalem,” the Holy Land—that is, an experience of Jerusalem through the eyes of the “I” (the pilgrim or traveller) in another cultural tradition. It is here that our story takes place, in the scattered historical scenes (the Holy City, the Wailing Wall, the Temple Mount, Jerusalem, Gethsêmani), nations (Israelite and Arabian), core images (God, Moses, Mohammed, John, Jesus), special objects (stones, bullet holes, crosses, moon, crews) and natural scenes (the Sea of Galilee, the Mediterranean, the Dead Sea, the Mount of Olives). Exposing himself in such a complicated context, the “I” who grew up within the traditions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism miserably witnessed this sacred place in which three major religions of the world emerged (Judaism, Christianity and Islamism), suffering from endless wars. Throughout history those that believed in God differently could not get along with each other. Eventually, they had to face catastrophic consequences—blood, hatred, hurt, bullet holes, tears, terror and death. Wang feels confused and helpless before this situation:

死去他们仍怀抱仇恨
山坡上埋着不一样的信仰

Dead, yet they still hold hatred
On the slope there buried another belief

*—Jerusalem* (trans. Bei Ta)

这座哭泣的墙上
时间的眼睛依旧流血
上帝未醒
他的儿子们仍在仇恨

*On this Wailing Wall*

---

The eyes of time keep running blood
God has not woken up
His offspring are still in hatred

—Wailing Wall (trans. Lin Zhenhua)\(^6\)

He laments that from ancient times Israel the nation chosen by God has been:

是世界喉咙里的钻石
阿拉伯肋骨中的钉子

Diamond in the throat of the world
Nail in the rib of Arabia

—Israel (trans. Bei Ta)\(^7\)

With the same fountainhead, Israel and Arabia should have a brotherly relationship; unfortunately they have continued fighting against each other in the name of “God” or “Allah” for hundreds of years. Adorno’s 1949 dictum—“To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”\(^8\)—posed the question of poet every just, philanthropic and merciful poet has to consider after Auschwitz. Furthermore, what role can poetry play in an age of danger, violation and faithlessness?

Of course, the poet is neither a provident statesman or diplomat, nor a detached believer. Though unable to put forward some concrete strategies or solutions, he prefers a poetic way of thinking, making his own voice and writing down stanzas, which advocate peace and universal love. He exerts himself in a struggle for human’s dignity and kindness. Likewise, Seamus Heaney describes the value of poetry in the modern world as “The power to persuade that vulnerable part of our consciousness of its rightness in spite of the evidence of wrongness all around it, the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values, that our very solitudes and distresses are creditable, in so far as they, too, are an earnest of our veritable human being.”\(^9\)

In this context, Wang unfolds a natural scene beyond death from a bystander’s perspective, which contrasts the heavily damaged Wailing Wall with the graveyard of innocent victims:

太阳将我和大海同时照亮
偌大的地中海没有阴影

The Sun enlightens the sea and me simultaneously
Mediterranean, so big, yet has no shadows

—The Mediterranean Sunshine (trans. Bei Ta)\(^10\)

---

\(^6\) Wang Guilin, Wode Yelusaleng, 25.
\(^7\) Wang Guilin, Wode Yelusaleng, 7.
\(^8\) Adorno, Theodore. Notes to literature, 87.
\(^10\) Wang Guilin, Wode Yelusaleng, 11.
There is an obvious tension between “sunshine” and “shadows,” implying a possibility of relieving a complicated history or a cruel reality. The sunshine, the sea, the sky and life itself—all of these transcend territories, nations, ages, religions and cultures. Are they not the homeland common to all humans, bestowed by God? If everyone who still stays “in his own shadow” (see Wailing Wall) while praying could lift his head and gaze at the azure Mediterranean afar; he may feel:

風中一阵密语
肯纳瑞特的湖水清澈又沁凉

*Whispers in the breeze*
*How clear and cool the Kinneret*

— *Lyre* (trans. Lin Zhenhua) 11

A heart warmed by sunshine could expel national hatred or narrowness, and as a result the “shadows” of history and of self might fade away. The poet expects that all people from different beliefs and nations

在天空深处接吻

*are kissing each other deep in the sky*

— *Jerusalem* (trans. Bei Ta) 12

...that all offspring of God could listen to Jesus’ instruction—“love your enemies” and “love thy neighbor” (Matthew 5: 43–44)—and soldiers, having put down their weapons, “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Micah 4: 3). Such a ray of “light” piercing shadow, darkness and confusion, predicts the light of eternity, belief or love, which dispels estrangement, hostility and prejudice:

更高的光雪亮我的眼睛

*The higher light enlightens my eyes*

— *I Am* (trans. Bei Ta) 13

密密的十字架在山顶发光

*Dense crosses are glimmering on the summit*

— *Reentering Jerusalem* (trans. Bei Ta) 14

挂钩圣殿山的左边的大脸庞的明月

Inquiries and Confession before the Cross: An Interpretation of Wang Guilin’s My Jerusalem

**The bright big moon hanging on the left of the Temple Mount**
— *Tonight* (trans. Lin Zhenhua)

白昼用它的光
刺穿所有谎言和错觉

**The Daylight pierced all lies and illusions**
*With its brightness*
— *There You Are* (trans. Lin Zhenhua)

It is only the divine “light” of redemption that could eliminate all the misery and darkness hanging about the human realm, and resolve historical contradictions.

In regard to the complicated conflicts of history, a poet does not propose any ultimate solution or criticize the other side; instead, he makes his own voice heard among disputations in pursuit of a balance between linguistic aesthetic self-sufficiency and sociological responsibility. We should treat *My Jerusalem* not as a poem in which the foreign poet depicts a miserable and violent history of a distant ancient city but, instead, as a reflection from the perspective of “the other” and an indirect expression made for a generation with memories of political violence and harsh lives. The poet goes beyond the boundary of language and nation, sharing the same feeling with his brothers and sisters in misery as well as praying for the possibility of redemption through self-examination—only natural sunlight or divine light can dispel the darkness and bright forth the eternal “light” of life, “love,” and “peace.”

**II. Inquiries in Gethsēmani: I and Thou**

Since the Chinese Union Version (*Heheben*) of the Bible was published in 1919, religious sentiment and discourse of Christianity have permeated Chinese culture, providing a spiritual source for modern Chinese literature, which would be universalized and religionized. In the first half of twentieth century, some Chinese poets had begun to read the Bible and research Christianity and Hebrew culture. As a result, Jesus’ crucified image, self-sacrificial spirit and divine personality became one of the subjects of modern Chinese poetry. For instance, Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 wrote a long poem entitled *Calvary* (that is, the Latinized name of Golgotha, the place where Jesus was crucified), Lu Xun 鲁迅 composed two prose poems entitled *Revenge* (*Fuchou*) on the basis of Jesus’ Passion, and Ai Qing 艾青 wrote *The Death of a Lazarus* (*Yige Lasaren de si*), a long poem with 109 lines that accord with the four Gospels. Mu Dan’s 穆旦 *Revelation* (*Yinxian*, 1947) also is a religious poem that discusses the possibility of believing in Christianity in the form of a dialogue. It ends with a moving stanza of prayer:

主呵，因为我们看见了，在我们聪明的愚昧里，
我们已经有太多的战争，朝向别人和自己，
太多的不满，太多的生中之死，死中之生，

---

Inquiries and Confession before the Cross: An Interpretation of Wang Guilin’s My Jerusalem

Lord, for we have seen, we have already seen too many wars,  
Too many discontents, life-in-death and death-in-life,  
Too many interests, disruptions, intrigues and vengeances,  
All these have pushed us to an opposite end, it is time  
We turn round, and see you.

Lord, for we have seen, we have already seen too many wars,  
Too many discontents, life-in-death and death-in-life,  
Too many interests, disruptions, intrigues and vengeances,  
All these have pushed us to an opposite end, it is time  
We turn round, and see you.

It is time now. And this is our twisted being  
For you to straighten. This is our split hearts  
For you to knead into a whole,  
O Lord, the fountainhead of being, let us hear the gushing sound of you flowing.

—Revelation (trans. Mu Dan)17

Different from their predecessors who accessed Christianity solely through reading the Bible, contemporary Chinese poets have more resources with regard to Christianity, such as Wang Guilin’s opportunity to visit Jerusalem. Having stood on the ground of this Holy City, Wang was no more a bystander, a hunter of knowledge or an explorer of curiosity. Instead, he put himself into the divine dimension where Christianity was born and confronted Jesus with a special Chinese identity. In Gethsêmani, the poet starts a conversation between “I” and “Thou”:

You went back to your lord,  
I have no lord. I can only admire you vainly.  
Your face solemn and quiet,  
Just like the Olive Hill hearing the holy decree.

多么羞愧！我，来到此处，
甚至算不上异教徒！
从前的悲苦无处哭诉，

17 Mu Dan, Mu Dan shiwenji, 253 (Chinese), 262 (English).
只能借诗行铺展灵魂的出路。

What a shame! I, come here,  
Yet I am even not a pagan!  
No way to explain tearfully the past sorrows,  
Poetry is the only way for my soul to be spread.

此刻闭上双眼向内心张望——
主啊，我看见血液翻飞，
在你的穹窿里轰然炸响。

This moment I close my eyes to look into my heart—  
O, Lord, I see blood flying up and down  
With a loud crash in your vault.

怀疑的尘灰纷纷
掉落阶前。我忍住泪水，
和你跪倒在客西马尼园。

Dusts of doubts falling onto steps  
In succession. I hold back my tears,  
Kneeling down at Gethsēmaní with you.

— Gethsēmaní (trans. Bei Ta)\textsuperscript{18}

This is one of the most moving and excellent poems in My Jerusalem. It could be compared with Bing Xin’s 冰心 (1900–1999) poem of the same name issued on the journal 生命 (Shēngmíng) in May 1921:

漆黑的天空，
冰冷的山石，
有谁和他一同儆醒呢？
睡着的只管睡着，
图谋的只管图谋。
然而——他伤痛着，血汗流着，
“父啊，只照着你的意思行。”
上帝啊！因你爱我们——
“父啊，只照着你的意思行。”阿们。

Under the dark sky,  
Among frozen mountain stones,  
Is there anyone awake alertly like him?

\textsuperscript{18}Wang Guilin, Wode Yelusaleng, 12-15.
Those who are sleeping are only concerned with sleeping;
Those who are conspiring, conspiring.
But—look at him whose wounds and injuries are hurting, blood and sweat running,
“Oh Father, only with your instruction I proceed.
Oh God! For you love us—
Oh Father, only with your instruction I proceed.” Amen.

—Gethsêmani (trans. Lin Zhenhua)\(^{19}\)

With this poem, Bing Xin became the first Chinese poet to employ the form of free verse to describe Jesus on the eve of his Passion. Despite the fact that it was impossible to witness the scene at that time, on the basis of the Gospels and her personal experience, Bing Xin still succeeds in revealing Jesus’ anguish and mentality when he was sold by Judas and learned of his destiny as a redemption for all of humanity. Bing Xin faithfully adopts the part of New Testament where Jesus meditates in the Gethsêmani. She chooses the third person, “He,” as the listener and the form of prayer to express her Christian faith. This expression constitutes the theme of “love” in Bing Xin’s early poems.

Wang Guilin’s Gethsêmani is the inner voice of a contemporary poet who “paves a spiritual path with stanzas.” Facing the Holy Son, the poet, who feels minute, ashamed and sorrowful and “even not a pagan,” has no way to hide and exhibits himself—“O, Lord, I see blood flying up and down/ With a loud crash in your vault./ Dusts of doubts falling onto steps/ In succession.” In the encounter with Jesus, his religious passion is ignited so much that he cannot help being embraced by and indulged in the omnipresent love of God. It is a kind of self-transcendence realized via the projection of human finiteness into God’s infiniteness. This spiritual transcendence means the human protest against absolute contingency and ridiculousness of being, as well as a reflection of that the ontological meaning, equals to that of human’s existence. The definite, minute self becomes fragmentary, but its inner world is purified and consoled while conversing with the infinite God.

Wang’s Gethsêmani displays an intimate relationship between humanity and God in the “I-and-Thou” dialogue. It reveals that, as an individual pursuing truth, the poet bravely opens his inwardsness and approaches God with reverence instead of reasoning or speculation. Here God is not a void concept, but some ultimate support for human existence. The German Jewish theologian Martin Buber indicates that the re-fusion of secularity and sacredness demonstrates a relationship rather than an entity. It exists in an encounter, a dialogue and an interpersonal transcendence, rather than in a solitary experience of self-examination and speculation. “The primary word I-Thou can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, and I say Thou. All real living is meeting.”\(^{20}\) Different from an objectified and empirical “I-It” relationship, in Wang’s Gethsêmani, the individual “I” lies in relation to the supreme “Thou,” where they meet, converse and speak face to face. While Bing Xin’s hero (or heroine) is simply praying to Jesus, Wang’s offers an intimate “I-Thou” communication that concerns the modern—a present two-way dialogue between humanity and God which brings humanity upward to the sublime divine world.

---

19 Bing Xin, *Bing Xin shi quanbian*113.
Buber insists that human must ponder over God, but this God is not beyond and detached from our world, but omnipresent, even in present and sensational objects with whom we converse every day. That is also what Wang feels about God (or the power of faith)—mental stimulation, expression, and confession, rather than written creeds, rational speculation, or the accumulation of knowledge. In the meeting of “I and Thou,” “I” become transcendent. The poet is willing to put aside all doubts and self-opinions, bowing his head for confession—“The cross in my heart/ Collapses and breaks suddenly” (心中原有的十字架/突然歪倒，破碎).21 As Jesus once said, “If any man will come after me, let he deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16: 24–25). Through the sacrifice and love on the Cross, humanity acquires the key to the divine world. When Jesus announces to his disciples “love God, love your neighbor and love your enemy,” we realize that Jesus’ love is neither a quality of the beloved nor an overwhelming sensation of the “I.” It exists in the “I-Thou” relationship. It exhibits and purifies itself in the relationship between God, my neighbor, my enemy and “I.” At this moment of the sacred encounter, the poet replies firmly—“I murmur: I love/ Even though I will never come again” (我低声说：我爱/即使此生再不回来).22

In another poem, I Am, the poet retells the significance of the Passion via the first person “I”:

Higher decrees in higher sky
The higher light enlightens my eyes
When the masses are willing to be blind
—I am

我是说出真相之人
是我显圣迹以上帝之名
即使刽子手不问我我也会主动回答
——我是

I am he who tells the truth
It is I who shows miracles in the name of God
Though executioners do not ask me, I answer by myself
—I am

不要责备将我出卖之人
是我给他勇气让他自己吊死
他做的事他自己也不明白

21 Wang Guilin, Wode Yelusaleng 22.
22 Wang Guilin, Wode Yelusaleng 23.
Inquiries and Confession before the Cross: An Interpretation of Wang Guilin’s My Jerusalem

Don’t blame he who sells me
It is I who grants him courage to hang himself
He cannot understand what he does
— I am

The Stone on the Olive Hill turns its back to me
The kind women are bursting into tears to me
I was born to bear all these things
— I am

It is fixed for me to carry the Cross
Jerusalem cannot be wailing forever
I am bleeding and walking upward to die at height
— I am

— I Am (trans. Bei Ta)23

Here according to the Gospels, Wang describes how Jesus confronted the whole world (the masses, the executioners, those who sell him) so vividly that it succeeds in narrating the significance of the Passion and the Cross (telling the truth, bearing the miserable, carrying the Cross and bleeding for humanity’s sin). It is by no means a coincidence that he repeats, “I am,” four times, as in all Gospels the Son preaches God’s evangel in the first person. Buber exclaims, “how powerful, even to being overpowering, and how legitimate, even to being self-evident, is the saying of I by Jesus! For it is the I of unconditional relation in which the man calls his Thou Father in such a way that he himself is simply Son, and nothing else but Son. Whenever he says I he can only mean the I of the holy primary word that has been raised for him into unconditional being.”24 As the mediator between human and God, Jesus spared no effort to amend their relationship. In Wang’s poem, every witness is brought into an authentic divine scene by Jesus’ “I am.” Thus we all enter the infinite existence and listen to God’s evangel.

III. Reentering Jerusalem: Redemption in Tears

Athens is an ancient city lying across the Mediterranean from Jerusalem. While constituting two directions and two spirits of the Mediterranean civilization, the two cities respectively begot the two essences of Western culture—reason and faith. Nevertheless, the journey of faith toward Jerusalem is quite different from the journey of reason toward Athens. The latter is characteristic of brightness or leisureliness, of tragic intoxication and ecstasy, whereas the former is replete with heartrending sorrow, sob, shudder and pressure, with confessions and redemptions. If the path to Athens represents a road to science and reason paved with knowledge, wisdom and self-presentation, then the path to Jerusalem is a road of spirit and faith built with abnegation, sacrifice, sympathy, humbleness and philanthropy. The theologian Lev Shestov believes that human knowledge does not free, but restrains, humanity, that the truths provided by knowledge are vanquished by human suffering. Therefore, it is only faith that can expunge man’s unrestrained arrogance and sin—“the path to the principles, sources, and roots of life leads through the tears with which one calls upon the Creator, and not through a reason which interrogates the ‘given.’”25 The real truth is the tears that fall while calling rather than what reason expresses. In the series of My Jerusalem, all core images that appear frequently relate to “tears,” such as “the kind women are bursting into tears to me” (see I Am), “the eyes of time” which shed tears in front of the Wailing Wall (see The Wailing Wall), the “I” that has “no way to explain tearfully the past sorrows” but “hold back tears, kneeling down at Gethsemani with you” (see Gethsemani) and Jesus who is willing to carry the Cross for “Jerusalem cannot be wailing forever” (see I Am).26 Obviously, Wang is pursuing a path of calling and tears.

This is why the poet has reentered Jerusalem, which is not only an attractive tourist city, but also a sacred place for pilgrims. In Reentering Jerusalem, he narrates that

是什么让我再一次回到这里
久久地，久久地不愿离去
我用泪水擦拭哭墙上的泪水
一把刀深深地插进心里

What makes me come here once again
Unwilling to leave for a long, long time
I wipe the tears on the Wailing Wall with my tears
A knife is deeply inserted into my heart

没有缘由的苦痛降临体内
当我重返朝圣之路
心中原有的十字架
突然歪倒，破碎——

Pains without causes have descended into my body

26 Wang Guilin, Wode Yelusaleng, 19; 25; 14; 19.
When I reenter the pilgrim road  
The cross in my heart  
Collapses and breaks suddenly—

贪婪地吮吸一切，将橄榄山的石头  
抱进怀里  
再一次，再一次抬起谦卑的头  
密密的十字架在山顶发光

Sucking everything greedily, taking the stone  
Of the Olive Hill into arms  
Again and again, I raise my humble head  
Dense crosses are glimmering on the summit

我低声说：我爱  
即使此生再不回来

I murmur: I love  
Even though I will never come again

—Reentering Jerusalem (trans. Bei Ta)27

For Wang, the journey of reentering Jerusalem is to go on a pilgrimage, to purify the mind and to pray for redemption. Before Jesus, everyone should carry his own cross, forgetting himself, “taking the stone of the Olive Hill into arms,” so as to throw himself into the embrace of God where he humbly moves toward eternal redemption.

In My Jerusalem, interwoven, conflicted and contrasted are opposite discourses or images such as light and shadow, the divine ego and the individual self, arrogance and humbleness, stones and tears, history and nature, the Cross shining on the hilltop and the cross of one’s own. These paradoxical discourses in turn reflect Wang’s confusion and exploration of truth. In Jerusalem the common birthplace of three great religions, “God did not wake/ His sons are still in hatred” (see The Wailing Wall); “Jerusalem/ There are still fresh bullet holes on walls” (see Jerusalem).28 Meanwhile, God’s “hiding” and “absence” make the modern man’s exploration and calling both possible and necessary. Approaching God and reaching faith in whichever way, the pilgrim might possibly be redeemed. After reentering Jerusalem where he had made reflections, Wang obtains redemptive power and is mentally baptized.

The last poem in the series, You are Right There, was written for another accomplished modern Chinese poet, Yi Dian 伊甸 (1953–). It falls on the contemporary Chinese context, leading to a virgin land where Chinese poets share their spiritual language and psychological world. The name Yi Dian is transliteration of Eden in the book of Genesis. Born in the 1950s, Yi Dian is also a poet in pursuit of a spiritual homeland like Wang Guilin. Here is one of his famous poems, Heian zhongde heliu (The River in the Dark):

We cannot see the river
But it is flowing
We cannot hear its sound
But it is flowing

We love it so much that we write for it one thousand psalms
But it is flowing
We hate it so much that we swear to forget it
But it is flowing

We run away far from it forever
But it is flowing
We search for it piously like exploring the Holy Land
But it is flowing

We roar, curse and warn it in a rage
But it is flowing
We cancel it, delete it and negate its existence
But it is flowing

We看不见河流
但是它在流
We听不见水声
但是它在流

我们爱它，我们给它写一千首赞美诗
但是它在流
我们恨它，我们发誓忘记它
但是它在流

We far away
But it is flowing
We search for it piously like exploring the Holy Land
But it is flowing

We roar, curse and warn it in a rage
But it is flowing
We cancel it, delete it and negate its existence
But it is flowing

我们远远逃开，一去不复返
但是它在流
我们寻找它，像寻找圣地一样虔诚
但是它在流

We气急败坏地吼叫，咒骂，威胁
但是它在流
我们取消它，删除它，否认它的存在
但是它在流

We far away
But it is flowing
We search for it piously like exploring the Holy Land
But it is flowing

We roar, curse and warn it in a rage
But it is flowing
We cancel it, delete it and negate its existence
But it is flowing

黑暗越来越黑，愈来愈暗
但是它在流
天塌下来，堵塞了它以外的所有河流
但是它在流
Inquiries and Confession before the Cross: An Interpretation of Wang Guilin’s My Jerusalem

_The dark turns deeper and deeper, stronger and stronger_
_But it is flowing_
_The sky falls, blocking all rivers except it_
_But it is flowing_

— _The River in the Dark_ (trans. Lin Zhenhua)²⁹

Contrasting this poem with Wang’s _You Are Right There_, one might notice some an intertextual dialogue between the two authors:

我燃烧
还是冰冷
你就在那里

_I am burning_
_But still frozen_
_You are right there_

写五十首赞美诗
或者紧紧地抱着自己
你就在那里

_I write fifty psalms_
_Or embrace myself tightly_
_You are right there_

穿过长江, 黄河
向北, 再向北
直到滩涂荒芜，海水寒凉
你就在那里

_I cross the Yangtze River and the Yellow River_
_Travel northward, again northward_
_Till where the shallows are arid and the deeps frigid_
_You are right there_

白昼用它的光
刺穿所有谎言和错觉
你就在那里

_The day uses its light_
_To pierce all lies and illusions_
_You are right there_

²⁹ Yi Dian, _Heian zhongde heliu_, 1-2.
Inquiries and Confession before the Cross: An Interpretation of Wang Guilin’s My Jerusalem

Through these two poems of a similar theme, we observe that contemporary Chinese poets share an idealistic spirit and strive for the invisible “sacred land.” The “You” in You Are Right There and the “It” in The River in the Dark actually refer to the same inexpressible and formless transcendental object. The last stanzas of both poems relate the same faith, the same pursuit. Both Yi Dian and Wang Guilin employ “the dark” as a metaphor for the real world and the present situation. However, while Yi Dian’s poem focuses on rhythm, Wang’s stresses visual effect. Moreover, the style of the latter seems simpler, clearer and touchable, its phrasing exquisite, its images meaningful. Let’s take two lines as an example—“The day uses its light/ To pierce all lies and illusions” and “The night draws its falls/ Leaving only shadows, sands and dirges.” Here “pierce” and “draw” are two personified verbs. “Burning” and “frozen”, “day” and “night” could arouse opposite physical feelings and visual effects. A potential meeting and convergence may take place between the Chinese civilization represented by two geographical terms “the Yangtze River, the Yellow River” and the Hebrew civilization by the Euphrates and the Tigris, which foretells the possibility of a dialogue between East and West.

Wang himself does not choose Christianity as an ingrained faith but, rather, he absorbed it merely as an intellectual and cultural resource, and used it to gain a broader perspective for examining and criticizing the fragmentation, digression and complexity of modern society. The meaning of reentering Jerusalem is that, for him, this journey opens a divine dimension which goes beyond the horizon (the secular world) vertically, that it deepens and broadens his poetry to an extension which was never achieved. Now he has gained an insight into darkness, lies, illusions and vanity. Now he has an aspiration, a belief and a passion to car-

ry his own cross. With passionate calling and contemplative focus, we may be freed from nihilistic and atheistic pessimism in this time of crisis. Commendable is the fact that Wang thinks over humanity’s history and living predicament through the relationship between I and He, individual and God. He penetrates into sufferings and chaos, violence and evil, despotism and distortion, as experienced by humanity of all ages. Thus arise self-reflection and consciousness of confession. He demolishes the myth of enlightened reason and technological worship and breaks the shackles of mass consumption. This is how he maintains the divinity of individual life. According to Stanley R. Hopper’s idea, poetry is not the Savior, but it can expose human inadequacy in a world plagued with evil and misery, and direct mankind toward God and his salvation. Wang is neither a Christian nor a pagan. As a poet with religious sentiments, he obtains a deep feeling toward faith through blending his personal experience with the miserable history of Jerusalem, as well as the tragic life of Jesus. Having acknowledged that his spirit was incomplete, deficient and guilty, Wang starts a dialogue with God in the relationship of “I and Thou” so that the mentality might be revived and the spirit converted. This is a noble quality rare in contemporary China, which lacks faith and self-reflection to some extent.

For a long time, the contemporary Chinese poetry was overwhelmed with decadent elements like physical desires, trifles and hedonistic descriptions. The masses were indulged in mechanical technology and commercial capital. As a result, their lives have sunk rapidly into emptiness, meanness, mendacity, corruption and disappointment. Nevertheless, for a nation with no faith or spirit, it will be void in ethos and jeopardized by this. *My Jerusalem* points out a peaceful path of redemption leading to the spiritual homeland. Perhaps all of us should calm down, looking up at the towering altar in the dark and asking ourselves: “Where is my Jerusalem?”

---

31 Hopper, *Xinyan de weiji*, 145.
REFERENCES


Bing X. *Bing X in shi quanbian* [The Complete Poetry of Bing X], Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1994.


