

THE REFLECTION OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S CREATIVE STYLE IN BING
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Abstract: This article discusses the famous Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore's book *Stray Birds*, and the poetry collections *Spring Waters* (《春水》) and *Stars* (《繁星》) created by Bing Xin under the inspiration of this work. It highlights the similarities, differences, and distinctive features in the creativity of these two authors, and also provides information about Bing Xin's "xiaoshi" genre.

Keywords: imitation, translation, Rabindranath Tagore, *Stars* (《繁星》), *Spring Waters* (《春水》), 小诗 (short poetry).

Bing Xin, a prominent representative of Chinese children's literature, was one of the devoted readers of the Nobel Prize laureate and one of India's greatest poets, Rabindranath Tagore. Moreover, she can be considered a poet who introduced Tagore's artistic orientation into her own works. When we look at Bing Xin's creativity, we can clearly observe the unique influence of Tagore. Based on Tagore's works and philosophy, Bing Xin studied them and confessed that she felt as though "pure dewdrops had fallen upon hot sand."¹ She even mentioned in her poems: "Tagore! I thank you for your joyful poetic spirit, and I am grateful for your noble philosophy that has comforted the loneliness of my soul."² In the early 1920s, Xu Zhimo (1897–1931) described her as "the brightest among Tagore's disciples."³

"*Stray Birds*" is considered one of Tagore's most prolific collections of poems. In this book, Tagore expresses his love for nature, his reflections on art, life, and peace. Some of the poems in the collection were originally written in 1889 and included in the Bengali collection *Kanika*, published in 1896, while others were written in English during his visit to Japan⁴. Tagore himself translated his Bengali poems into English, and this collection was published in 1916 by the Macmillan Company in New York.

For the first time, parts of *Stray Birds* were translated into Chinese during the "May Fourth Movement" by Zheng Zhenduo, and published in influential journals such as *New Youth* and many other newspapers and magazines. The complete edition was later published by the Shanghai Commercial Press under the title 《飞鸟集》 in October 1922, becoming one of the best-selling Tagore collections in China⁵.

This work, in particular, also attracted Bing Xin's interest. From the very beginning, she was fascinated by the artistic form of *Stray Birds*. What made the work distinctive was that the

¹ P. A. George "East Asian Literature (Japanese, Chinese and Korean) an Interfere with India" New Delhi: Northern Book Centre 2006.

² John Cayley "For a discussion of Tagore's influence on the form and style of Bing Xin's early poetry" 1989.

³ 徐志摩《泰戈尔来华》, Fiction Montly, 2014 10 September.

⁴ Thompson Edward "Robindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist" Delhi: Oxford UP 1991.

⁵ 张羽《泰戈尔与中国现代文学》昆明, 云南人民出版社, 2004 年.

poems were written in an almost rhyme-free and extremely concise form. Indeed, the irregular verses and short sentences made the collection read almost like prose. This form inspired Bing Xin in 1919 to create a new style of writing poetry. In the preface to *Stars*, Bing Xin explains: “One evening in 1919, as I was sitting by the fireplace with my younger brother Bing Chong, reading Tagore’s *Stray Birds*, he asked me: ‘You often say that your thoughts are scattered and difficult to collect in one place. If so, why not jot them down?’ From then on, I began to write down my impressions from reading in my notebook.”⁶

In her 1933 essay *My Literary Life*, Bing Xin reiterated this idea. The inspiration she derived from Tagore became the starting point of her poetry. According to Bing Xin herself, she only turned to poetry after studying Tagore’s *Stray Birds*. She noted that the free poetic style of her first collection *Stars* (《繁星》) and the later collection *Spring Waters* (《春水》) were both deeply infused with Tagore’s distinctive features. These two collections laid the foundation for the creation of a new genre — *xiaoshi* (小诗, “short poetry”) — and were regarded as the brightest examples of this style. Readers, in describing them, often used expressions such as “Bing Xin’s style,” “the style of *Stars*,” or “the style of *Spring Waters*.” Yet, although created under the influence of Tagore’s work, these two collections are considered both an imitation and an innovative literary endeavor. However, imitation does not mean plagiarism.

Bing Xin did not simply adopt Tagore’s poetic form in an identical manner. Departing from Tagore’s transcendental writing style, she wrote from the perspective of a modern Chinese woman author, reshaping Tagore’s tendencies through a realistic literary style. In this creative process, her dual role as both writer and translator is evident. Her role as a writer ensured her independence as a critical translator.

Tagore’s work itself has no definitive conclusion, meaning that it remains open to continuous interpretations. Two Chinese versions — the linguistic translation by Zheng Zhenduo and Bing Xin’s rewritten interpretation — serve as good examples of this. Zheng Zhenduo titled his translation 《飞鸟集》 (“Collection of Flying Birds”), which literally means “Flying Birds.” Bing Xin, however, retitled it 《迷途飞鸟》 (“Stray Birds”), which was closer to Tagore’s intended meaning.

In her two collections, Bing Xin’s poetry also reflects changes from a gender perspective. She expanded the concept of “maternal love,” which was a secondary theme in Tagore, into a central theme. By incorporating her own life experiences with her mother and more broadly depicting the relationship between mother and daughter, she constructed a female world that resisted patriarchal interference, demonstrating her feminist worldview.

Thematic Scope. Tagore possessed an exceptional ability to perceive and understand the beauty of nature. Unlike Kant’s notion of “disinterestedness” in aesthetics, Tagore, as a subject, bridges the gap between himself and the object of nature; instead, through his verses, he merges into a harmonious unity with nature itself. This aspect can also be observed in Bing Xin’s *Stars* and *Spring Waters*. Both Tagore and Bing Xin demonstrate a profound love for nature. This is evident from the titles of their works and the significant number of poems devoted to this theme. Out of the 325 poems in *Stray Birds*, 105 are directly related to the natural environment. In

⁶ 《冰心传》 Nanjing: Jiangsu Literary Publishing House, 1995.

Stars, 60 out of 164 poems, and in Spring Waters, 102 out of 182 poems, are dedicated to the same theme. Without exception, all of these poems glorify nature.

Tagore's faith in love had an especially strong influence on Bing Xin. It is well known that, apart from his family background and Christian beliefs, this faith constituted the third key component of his creative philosophy. Indeed, Bing Xin came to be recognized as a modern Chinese writer who promoted the ideas of "universal love" and the "philosophy of love" through her work. One of Bing Xin's oft-repeated mottos was: "Everything lives through love." This theme is extensively developed in both of her poetry collections.

Other subjects that Tagore addressed also resonate, in various ways, in Bing Xin's poetry. For example, when it comes to the relationship between silence and speech, both authors believed that while words have limited power, silence is the highest form of expressing truth and beauty. Regarding the concept of humility and greatness, Tagore wrote: "We come nearer to the great only when we are clothed in humility" (Stray Birds, Poem 235)⁷. Their shared belief that "smallness signifies greatness" is also reflected in their evaluations of children. Both poets expressed their common view that children, with their innocence and wisdom, surpass worldly luxuries.

Imagery. Tagore frequently employed antonyms to create contrasts and parallel structures. For example, he wrote: "Life is like summer flowers; death is like autumn leaves" (Stray Birds, Poem 237). Structurally, the two lines are parallel: "life" is contrasted with "death," and "summer flowers" with "autumn leaves," forming a sharp opposition between the two states. This characteristic of Tagore's poetry can also be found in Bing Xin's works. Indeed, her poems also contain verses that juxtapose life and death. Although the imagery is modified, the parallel structure of the verses reflects their similarity.

Philosophical Meaning. All of the poems in Tagore's Stray Birds are imbued with deep philosophical significance, which is one of the most striking features of his poetry. Alongside the motto mentioned above, this characteristic later became the foundation of Bing Xin's own poetic style. According to Xu Xuelin, "Some of Bing Xin's poems, composed of only ten or so words and expressions, are so rich in meaning that another writer might struggle to explain them even with thousands of words."⁸

Distinctive Features in Bing Xin's Collections. Under the influence of Tagore, Bing Xin polished and reshaped his artistic model according to her own environment. She transformed the transcendental, abstract, utopian, mystical, and historical atmosphere of Stray Birds into a concrete and realistic context in Stars and Spring Waters. Although she did not make social or political issues the central themes of her poetry nor write about them directly, she did not exclude them entirely from her work.

Moreover, autobiographical writing became the main factor distinguishing Bing Xin's creativity from Tagore's. It is clear that while both Bing Xin and Tagore address their readers in the first person, Tagore's "I" in his poems is distinct from his real self, whereas Bing Xin's "I"

⁷ Rabindranath Tagore "Collected poems and plays of Rabindranath Tagore". New York: The Macmillan 1964.

⁸ Rabindranath Tagore "Collected poems and plays of Rabindranath Tagore". New York: The Macmillan 1964.

corresponds to the author herself. In other words, Bing Xin adapted her themes to the Chinese literary context, skillfully incorporating personal and social experiences that were absent in Tagore's letters.

After the publication of her two poetry collections that reflected a new poetic style — namely, rhyme-free, free-verse short poems — readers warmly welcomed them with great interest. From 1920 onward, Bing Xin's short poems began appearing in newspapers, and in 1923, they were compiled into two volumes, *Stars* and *Spring Waters*. According to Hu Yudji, members of the literary circle, while reading her works, could feel the “pure pearls of emotion” within her lines⁹. Ba Jin also expressed a similar view in his preface to Bing Xin's biography: “Bing Xin is a beloved poet for all of us. We love the imagery of the sea and the stars that she writes about, and we follow her creativity with great interest. Especially for children like me, who grew up in loneliness, her works bring warmth and the love of a lost Mother. I still remember that one summer day, sitting in a garden full of singing birds, I began reading *Stars*. Inspired by it, I even tried writing short poems of the same kind. Each poem I read has remained vividly imprinted in my memory ever since.”¹⁰

In conclusion, Bing Xin's mode of thinking, her poetic innovations, and her fluent creative style made her poetry particularly popular among young readers. Metaphorically speaking, there were many students who “picked up their pens” to imitate her works. In fact, writers such as Zong Baihua, Xu Xuelin, and Ba Jin, inspired by Bing Xin, even organized a special collective literary group to promote the *xiaoshi* genre. This style of poetry became especially widespread in the late 1920s. Unlike Tagore's English poetics, Bing Xin created abundant works by harmonizing the requirements of both classical and modern poetry. As the founder of the *xiaoshi* genre and its most outstanding practitioner, she left a distinctive mark on the development of modern Chinese poetry.

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⁹ 范伯群《冰心研究资料》北京: 北京出版社 1984 122 页.

¹⁰ 范伯群《冰心研究资料》北京: 北京出版社 1984 122 页.