



A Theoretical Defense of “Twilight Cosmologies”

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Abstract

This paper defends the methodological grounding of Twilight Cosmologies, a comparative study of a classical-inflected Japanese narrative poem and a modern Chinese regulated verse. Although comparing works across cultures and historical periods can raise doubts, the study relies on well-established critical frameworks that clarify shared features of poetic expression. T. S. Eliot's idea of tradition supports the view that modern poems written in classical styles are creative reinterpretations of inherited forms. Cleanth Brooks and Roman Jakobson offer methods for considering the functions of tensions, coherence, and linguistic patterning, while Northrop Frye's Theory of Archetypes is used to discern how “twilight” is a common symbol of liminal transition. Edward Said and Eugene Eoyang influenced bring the comparison to a “two-way mirror,” reflecting differences rather than superiority. Valuable insights from Foucault, Ong, and Turner further support readings of divine withdrawal and moral agency in East Asian literature, showing how twilight imagery shapes distinct philosophical worlds.

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Keywords: tradition, structural analysis, archetypal symbolism, comparative poetics, cultural specificity, twilight imagery

1. Introduction

It is a known common fact that comparative studies that cross linguistic and cultural boundaries often face criticism on methodological rigor and interpretive validity. The study under discussion brings together a Japanese poem written in a classical waka-inflected narrative form and a Chinese poem composed in modern regulated verse. Some critics may have the question on comparability of these texts, the symbolic readings, or the legitimacy of treating modern classical-style poems as objects of scholarly comparison.

Emphasizing fact is that one of the poems under discussion is authored by a practicing poet does not weaken the scholarly analysis. Many traditions recognize that creative practitioners often possess a heightened awareness of form, symbolism, and inherited conventions. The interpretive claims in this study do not rely on personal authority but on established theoretical frameworks, close reading, and comparative method. The role of the poet here is not to privilege subjective insight but to illuminate how classical forms continue to shape modern expression, a task fully consistent with the standards of literary scholarship. With this position clarified, the study turns to the theoretical foundations that support its comparative method. This dual perspective aligns with a long tradition of poet-scholars whose creative practice deepens their critical insight.

This defense argues that the study is justified on theoretical grounds. It draws on Eliot's concept of tradition [Eliot], Brooks's structural unity [Brooks], Frye's archetypal criticism [Frye], Jakobson's poetic function [Jakobson], and contemporary comparative theory [Eoyang; Said] to show that the paper stands on firm intellectual foundations.

Although the theorists referenced in this defense come from Western intellectual traditions, their frameworks address questions that are not limited by geography or culture. Concepts such as form, structure, symbolic patterning, and the dynamics of interpretation operate across literary systems. These theories are used here not to impose Western categories on East Asian texts but to illuminate universal features of poetic expression that appear in many traditions. Later sections draw on Foucault and Ong to explain how symbolic systems persist across shifts in knowledge and media. This approach respects cultural specificity while recognizing that certain analytical tools can travel across contexts without distorting the works under study. Clarifying this methodological ground helps show how classical forms continue to shape modern East Asian poetics and how comparative work can responsibly engage shared symbols without flattening cultural difference.

This defense does not claim universal applicability but focuses on the specific symbolic and structural features of the two poems under study, acknowledging that its insights arise from their particular literary and cultural contexts.

2. Eliot and the Legitimacy of Modern Classical Forms

2.1. Tradition as a Living Continuum

Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" offers a compelling response to the claim that modern poems written in classical forms are somehow less genuine or unworthy of comparison. Eliot's argument points that tradition is not a static inheritance but a dynamic continuum in which new works reshape the meaning of the past.

The two poems examined in the study participate in above dynamic continuum. Their classical forms are not imitations but deliberate engagements with inherited symbolic grammars. Eliot's theory supports the idea that modern poets can legitimately inhabit classical idioms to explore contemporary concerns [Eliot].

2.2. The Historical Sense

Eliot's concept of the historical sense, an awareness of both the past's distinctness and its continuing presence, supports the study's methodological approach [Eliot]. The poems are modern, yet they speak through classical structures. This dual temporality enriches the comparative analysis rather than undermining it.

3. Structural Unity and Symbolic Coherence

3.1. Cleanth Brooks and the Well-Wrought Text

Cleanth Brooks emphasizes that poems achieve meaning through internal tensions and resolutions [Brooks]. The study's close reading of twilight, shadow, and divine withdrawal aligns with Brooks's method. The symbolic contrasts in both poems arise from the internal logic of each text rather than from external imposition.

3.2. Roman Jakobson and the Poetic Function

Jakobson's theory of the poetic function illustrates how language foregrounds itself in poetry. Tonality patterning in the Chinese poem and atmospheric diction in the Japanese poem are in line with the arguments Jakobson had. This sets their comparison on linguistic and structural features, not

subjective impressions.

4. Archetypes and Cross-Cultural Symbolism

4.1. Northrop Frye and Archetypal Criticism

Frye's archetypal criticism provides a theoretical basis for identifying twilight as a shared symbolic threshold across cultures [Frye]. Twilight functions as a liminal archetype that marks transitions between worlds. The study's argument that both poems use twilight to explore uncertainty and transformation is consistent with Frye's theory of recurring symbolic patterns.

4.2. Archetypes Without Reduction

Frye warns against reducing cultural specificity [Frye]. The study respects this caution by showing how the same archetype produces different emotional and cosmological effects in Japanese and Chinese contexts. The comparison reveals divergence rather than erasure.

5. Comparative Literature and Cultural Specificity

5.1. Edward Said and the Ethics of Comparison

Said's insistence on cultural specificity supports the study's approach [Said]. The comparison here is not to claim equivalence between Japanese and Chinese traditions. Rather, to serve as a highlighting point how shared symbols are shaped by distinct histories, philosophies, and aesthetic values.

5.2. Eoyang's Two-Way Mirror

The study follows Eoyang's model of comparison as a two-way mirror [Eoyang]. Each poem sheds light on the other without absorbing it. This approach sidesteps cultural hierarchies and preserves the integrity of each tradition.

6. Defense of Interpretive Claims

Two additional thinkers help clarify the interpretive ground of this study. Foucault's work on how knowledge takes shape over time offers a way to see how symbolic systems shift across historical and cultural settings, which matters when reading modern poems that draw on classical traditions. Ong's reflections on the movement between oral and written expression show how poetic forms can carry older cosmologies into new literary contexts. Together, their ideas support the view that symbolic patterns can endure even as the cultural frameworks around them change.

6.1. Twilight as a Liminal Symbol

The reading of twilight as a threshold is supported by Frye's archetypal theory [Frye], Turner's concept of liminality [Turner], and East Asian cosmological traditions [Foucault; Said]. The study does not overgeneralize. It shows how twilight functions differently in each poem while retaining its symbolic core.

6.2. Divine Withdrawal

The interpretation of divine recession is grounded in Japanese notions of subtle kami withdrawal [Ong; Said] and Chinese cosmological cycles of decline and renewal [Foucault]. These readings are consistent with established scholarship and with the internal imagery of the poems.

6.3. The Moral Agent

The contrast between emotional sincerity in the Japanese poem and ethical resolve in the Chinese poem is supported by Japanese aesthetics of refined emotion [Brooks; Eliot] and Chinese traditions of moral cosmology [Frye; Said]. The study does not equate these concepts but shows how each tradition constructs the moral agent differently.

7. Contribution to the Field

7.1. Filling a Scholarly Gap

This research contributes to a domain that has attracted very little attention. Comparative studies of modern East Asian poems composed in a classical form are very rare, and themes such as twilight have never been explored across Japanese and Chinese literary traditions before. Poems composed in a modern style based on classical East Asian forms are rarely compared for their differences, and it seldom ever occurs to people to research their worlds of symbols together.

7.2. Advancing Cross-Cultural Poetics

The study contributes to comparative literature by demonstrating how shared symbols can generate distinct emotional and philosophical worlds [Said; Frye]. It offers a model for culturally sensitive comparison that avoids flattening differences.

8. Conclusion

This study shows that the comparative method used in *Twilight Cosmologies* is both theoretically grounded and culturally responsible. Eliot's understanding of tradition supports the use of modern poems written in classical styles [Eliot], while Brooks and Jakobson provide a solid basis for examining their structural and linguistic integrity [Brooks; Jakobson]. Frye's archetypal criticism helps clarify how twilight and shadow operate as shared symbolic thresholds [Frye], and the work of Said and Eoyang ensures that the comparison remains sensitive to cultural difference rather than collapsing the two traditions into a single frame [Said; Eoyang].

Defending this methodology clarifies how classical forms continue to shape modern East Asian poetics and how comparative work can navigate shared symbols without erasing cultural nuance. The study contributes to the field by showing that twilight, shadow, and divine withdrawal form a symbolic grammar that resonates across East Asia while still producing distinct emotional and philosophical worlds in Japanese and Chinese literature [Turner; Foucault; Ong].

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