ABSTRACT

Many factors influence a writer. Besides his own natural ability, his own culture and foreign culture are important factors. This thesis explores the influence of traditional Chinese and Western literature on Bai Xianyong’s writings.

Tang poetry, Song ci, poetic dramas of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, as well as the famous Qing novel, Dreams of the Red Chamber, all decisively influenced Bai Xianyong’s writing. Nineteenth century Russian literature, and modern American and English literature also inspired him. Bai’s interest in writing was initially piqued by his study of Chinese classical literature. He and his classmates launched a magazine called Modern Literature in 1960 in which they introduced and translated a great deal of Western modern literature. In 1963, Bai went to the United States for further study, and since then has been fully immersed in Western literature.

Bai’s short stories are filled with poetic spirit and allusion. He gives extremely vivid descriptions of his characters. Their language is rich and lifelike, obviously influenced by Dreams of the Red Chamber. The main theme of all the short stories is similar to that of Dreams of the Red Chamber: “life is like a dream, everything will disappear”.

The main American influences are those of William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams. Bai identifies with Faulkner’s Christian spirit and sympathy for those who experience failure, and greatly admired the use of the ‘stream of consciousness’ technique employed in the novel The Sound and the Fury. His use of it in Wandering in the Garden, Suddenly Awakening met with great acclaim.

The main British writers influencing Bai’s writing have been Emily Bronte, James Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence. The strong passion in Bai’s characters is drawn from Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights. His Taipei Characters is reminiscent of James Joyce’s Dubliners. Both Dubliners and Taipei Characters are close not only in style, but also in spirit. They reflect the tragic decline of the writers’ national cultures. The description of mankind’s most inner feelings and emotions, as well as the sensitive handling of sex in Bai’s early works can be attributed to D.H. Lawrence.