

Sense behind Nonsense

The nonsense poetic elements in the contemporary

Hong Kong poetry

Although nonsense is often associated with something illogical, the greatest poems in the world often contain such illogical elements. Nonsense literary works (such as *Alice in Wonderland* and Zhuangzi's *Butterfly Dream*) bring forth a new and deeper harmony through its contradictions, and there lies a meaning behind semantic and logical nonsense. In order to decode these puzzles and interpret its sense, the nonsense poetry can firstly be viewed from three main aspects:

1. Nonsense poetry is mostly creative language and thought play;
2. Nonsense shows rebellion against the constraints of thought and reality, against grammatical, logical and ideal norms; but at the same time there is a deeper escapism from reality behind it;
3. Nonsense is conditioned by a specific group of readers and a specific context. The so-called nonsense for reader group A is probably meaningful for group B.

Hong Kong literature — especially poetry — has similar characteristics: hybridity and fluid boundary. Caught between Chinese tradition and British colonial culture, Hong Kong writers have always tried to break the boundaries amidst the confusion and search for their

own identity. Hong Kong literary scholar Yesi 也斯 refers to the nonsense poetic elements (hybrid use of Chinese and English language and allusions) in Hong Kong poetry of the 1950s as "procedures to suggest the confusion around Hong Kong identity." Since the 1970s, writers have emphasized the local aesthetics of Hong Kong literature through the literary trend of "everydayness (生活化)." In the 1980s and 1990s, social confusion was stronger before Hong Kong's return to China. Some writers, such as Yam Gong 饮江 and Xixi 西西, often combine the nonsense poetic elements with the everyday life to create their unique style. Such nonsense is regarded as "secret code" by Hong Kong locals, but the non-locals are clearly in need of interpretation guidance. This research focus on three central questions:

1. How is nonsense defined and how is it differentiated with the parodies, paradoxes or other literary phenomenon?
2. How do Hong Kong natives understand nonsense that is foreign and absurd to readers with other cultural backgrounds?
3. What are the connections between nonsense in poetry and Hong Kong's fluid identity?

To answer the questions above, this research will begin with the textual analysis of the selected nonsense poetry by Hong Kong poets. In addition, social science and cultural studies will be conducted on Hong Kong's hybridity and fluid border.

The literary imaginations of individual poets are among the construction of a common identity for Hong Kong literature and culture. In this regard, the nonsense opens a new perspective to interpret poetry in Hong Kong and Hong Kong itself despite the cultural and political barriers, while looking at the collective Hong Kong sensibilities in recent decades.