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### Dream: One of the Important Driving Forces of Literary Creation Taking Ancient Chinese Poetry Creation as an Example

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#### Abstract:

There are a large number of dream-related works in literary works. The research object of this study is poems that record the scene in a dream after waking up, works created in dreams, and works that use them to symbolize specific meanings in ancient Chinese poetry creation. The study aims to explore the relationship between dreams and literary creation. This study has a new perspective on motivation for literary creativity, disrupting previous studies from the literature itself to explore the relationship between dreams and literary creativity. The research puts forward the dream homology and literary creation drawn from real life and has similar emotions and common aesthetic characteristics, which is the basis for dreams to become the driving force of literary creation. The research results show that the dream is one of the essential driving forces of literary creation because it not only provides inexhaustible material for literary creation but is also a critical inspiration for literary creating, and it is an essential method of creation or expression, which has a significant influence on literary criticism in ancient China.

**Keywords:** dream, ancient Chinese poetry, literary creation.

### 夢想：文學創作的重要驅動力之一——以中國古詩詞創作為例

#### 摘要：

文學作品中有大量與夢有關的作品。本研究的研究對象為中國古代詩歌創作中記錄夢中情景的詩歌、在夢中創作的作品、用夢來象徵特定意義的作品。本研究旨在探討夢與文學創作的關係。本研究對文學創作動機有了新的視角，顛覆了過去從文學本身出發的研究，探討夢想與文學創作的關係。研究提出夢與取材自現實生活的文學創作具有相似的情感和共同的美感特徵，這是夢成為文學創作動力的基礎。研究結果表明

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，夢是文學創作的本質驅動力之一，因為它不僅為文學創作提供了取之不盡的素材，而且是文學創作的批判性靈感，是一種必不可少的創作或表達方式，對中國古代文學批評產生了重大影響。

**关键词：**夢，中國古詩詞，文學創作。

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between literature and dreams has a long history. As early as more than two thousand years ago, the first collection of Chinese poetry, *Shi Jing*, contained descriptions of dream bears and dream fish (Cheng, 2004). As for the various literary works related to dreams, history books, poems, novels, and plays have a large number of dream elements, such as 27 dream records in *Zuo Zhuan* (Zuo, 2016), more than 70 in the poems of Li Shangyin in the Tang Dynasty, 135 ones named after dreams by Lu You in the Song Dynasty, four plays handed down by Tang Xianzu in the Ming Dynasty revolve around them, and the novel *Dream of Red Mansions* in the Qing Dynasty is the most outstanding representative of Chinese dream literature. So, what drives writers to create literature? Why do writers write about dreams in their works? This is a topic in the psychology of literary creation. People's psychological activities and creative thinking activities are complex, diverse, mysterious, and constantly changing. Due to the different subjective and objective conditions of writers (such as thought, emotion, character, temperament, knowledge, accomplishment, family background, social status, experience, encounter, and others), they have different trigger points for creation and various forms of inspiration. The driving forces of creation naturally differ. Direct observation and experience, indirect understanding and revelation, imagination flying over time and space, association from one place to another, change of ideas, emotional fluctuations, changes in interpersonal relations, tribulations on the road of life, influence of nature, etc., all the factors of the writer himself and the social environment in which he lives may become different driving forces for the creation of various writers. Even if the same writer creates different works, the impetus will differ. But no matter how different the situation of creative impetus, one thing is certain that dream is one of the critical driving forces of literary creation, is an essential motivation of creation, and is an expression of creative inspiration. This paper considers ancient Chinese poetry creation as an example to demonstrate the form, motivation, and formation of dreams as the driving force of literary creation.

## 2. The Main Forms of Expression of Dreams in Literary Creation

### 2.1. Record Literary Works after Waking Up from Dreams

Everyone can dream, every night has dreams, some of which are so memorable that they arouse the author's impulse to create, and describe the dream in terms of

the person or scene dreamed, so as to become various literary works, which is called dream recording works. The characteristic of this kind of works is that they are all from the dream, and they are all memories of the dream after waking up, and the author is writing under the condition of knowing that it is a dream, so even if the author's memory is good, it is impossible to write all the dreams, and generally can only write its general, fragments or dreams the most prominent and the most clear memory after waking up. This is a limitation, but it is also strength. Because the author is awake to write, not only can write dreams, but also can write all kinds of feelings after the dream, can express emotions, can discuss, can use the topic to play, than simply write dreams in the content is richer and deeper, but also can see the author's thoughts and feelings and creative personality.

Bai Juyi is the most prolific poet in the Tang Dynasty, and his dream works are also numerous. Some of them recorded people, objects and feelings in their dreams. For example, Bai Juyi's *Dream of Going Up to the Mountain* recounts a dream in which he dreamt of going up to Mount Song alone when he was 71 years old, suffering from an illness in his foot that made it difficult for him to move. The first part of the poem describes his dream of walking up the mountain on crutches, the pace of the mountain is as strong as when he was young, the second part of the dream after waking up the foot is sick in reality but not in the dream, explaining the relationship between illusion and reality, is quite philosophical.

### 2.2. Literary Works Created in Dreams

Literary works created in dreams are different from those created after waking up. Literary works created in dreams can be divided into three types: first, the whole creation is completed in a dream, and after waking up, it is only written according to memory; Second, although the work is completed in the dream, but only remember part of it after waking up, so after waking up to complete the work according to memory; Third, only a part of the work was created in the dream, and after waking up, he continued to complete his creation according to the dream: some of them were continued at that time, and some were made up after a period of time. Although the works in these three cases are basically created in dreams, only the former can be called pure dream works, and the latter two are between the works of recording dreams after waking up and the works created in dreams, that is, they have the characteristics of both types of works. Therefore, the former, under the influence and limitation of the special environment in which they are composed entirely in

dreams, is generally shorter and more illusory and mysterious than dream-writing works. The characteristics of the latter are basically the same as the creation after waking up. In addition, because the work is created in a dream, it is easier to partially forget after waking up. For example, Mei Yaochen, a poet in the Song Dynasty, dreamed that his wife, who died, was playing with him by the river during the day. They said a lot of words and saw a lot of scenery in the dream, but after waking up, they only remembered one sentence: "Climbing Yunmu Mountain together, not staying in the same palace." After waking up, according to the meaning of the dream, continue to write the complete poem, which belongs to the second case of dream work.

### **2.3. Works That Use Dreams to Symbolize Specific Meanings**

This kind of works is characterized by a dream as a metaphor, to paint the scene, lyrical discussion, in order to express a certain kind of real life that is dreamized, express the author's thoughts, emotions, aspirations, ideals, etc., and explain a certain truth. As far as the authors themselves are concerned, although they do not necessarily have real dreams, they are inspired and experienced directly or indirectly from their own dreams or those of others, and they regard dreams as a special means of expression in literature. Therefore, in such works, the dream does not necessarily have the vision and meaning of the dream itself, but often only exists as a metaphor or symbol. In other words, the dream writing itself is not the main purpose of the author, the main purpose is to write the symbolic meaning of the dream, so in-depth exploration and accurate geographical interpretation of the metaphor and symbolic meaning of the dream has become the key to appreciate and analyze such works. Because of this, the scope of expression and the images contained in such works are often far beyond the dream writing itself and have a high degree of generality and wide adaptability. The history of literature tells us that if a person's dream is unique, then the dream writing of such works has universal significance, which can arouse the resonance of all people with similar experiences, thoughts and feelings, so as to transcend time and space and become a common idiom and idiom. For example: Tang Dynasty poet Li Shangyin's "The Sad Zither" "Why should the sad zither have strings? Each string and strain evokes but vanishes springs. Dim morning dream to be a butterfly, amorous heart poured out in cuckoo's cry. "Use the symbolic meaning of Zhuangzhou butterfly to express the meaning of life like a dream and the past like smoke.

## **3. The Inner Relationship between Dreams and the Driving Force of Literary Creation**

Why do dreams become one of the important driving forces of literary creation? The main reason is that dream and literature have the same origin, they both

come from real life, have similar emotional experience and common esthetic characteristics, and these similarities make dream and literature can be connected, laying a solid foundation for dream to become the driving force of literary creation.

### **3.1. Dreams and Literature Are Derived from Real Life**

"Don't be afraid, kid. It was a dream. It wasn't real," people often say when comforting a child woken up by a nightmare. The implication is that everything in a dream is just a dream, not enough to cause actual harm to the dreamer. "Stop dreaming and be realistic," we often say when advising someone to be down-to-earth rather than utopian. The subtext is that dreams, however beautiful, are illusory and offer no practical benefit to the individual. So why do children wake up scared by nightmares? Why do adults fall in love with their dreams? This is because the illusory dream image contains the basis for real life.

Although dream is a kind of strange, unreal spiritual activities, but strange dream like hidden behind is our familiar figure. All the characters, things and scenes in dreams, including gods, ghosts and so on, can be directly or indirectly found their prototypes or shadows in real life. In other words, the formation of any dream is based on specific real life. What people see, hear, say and do in real life, in the final analysis, are the only source of dreams. Any dream is a reflection of real life, of course, it is a distorted, deformed and even distorted reflection, and it is a combination of different time and space and different species within a framework. Moreover you have a magical dream image. From this point of view, dream and literature are of the same origin, that is, they are also derived from life, dream and literature are part of people's real life, especially spiritual life, there is a natural connection between them, stimulate each other, promote each other, and complement each other.

To sum up, we can attribute it to such a process: dreams and literature have the same origin, and the life and thoughts of the writer can be transformed into dreams, thereby arousing the writer's creative impulse, and expressing it in a certain form of works, that is, becoming dream literature. This process clearly explains the cause of dreams and their driving effect on creation, showing that dreams become the driving force of creation, not the power of God, but the role of life. For example, consider the creation of poems on the theme of missing home as an example. The reason why there are so many works on this theme is that many writers have lived away from their hometown for a long time and have an urgent desire to return to their hometown, or they have heard and witnessed similar experiences of others and thus touched their own thoughts, so they will enter the dream and enter the literary creation. Another example: there are a lot of poetry works on the theme of mourning for the dead, because many writers have the pain of losing their wives, the pain of missing their wives, they cannot meet

in the world, so they put their feelings in dreams. Once they really have a dream, they cannot help writing it out. For example, the Song Dynasty poet Su Shi married Wang Fu at the age of 19, and they were very fond of each other. Unfortunately, Wang Fu died suddenly after 11 years. When Su Shi was 40 years old, he returned to his hometown in a dream and dreamed that his beloved wife Wang Fu was dressing by the window. After waking up, Su Shi described the dream to express his pain of losing his wife, which was sincere and deeply moving. Once such a dream makes the writer excited, it can become a driving force for creation and create corresponding literary works.

### ***3.2. Literature and Dreams Have Similar Emotional Experiences***

Literature is a concentration of emotions, a burst of emotions, fission of emotions, a song of emotions, a sublimation of emotions, and it is a constant rule of creation that emotions are moved in the heart and expressed in words. Similarly, the same is true of dreams. Zhou G.D., 1046 BC divided dreams into six categories: "One is a proper dream, two is a nightmare, three is a thoughtful dream, four is a waking dream, five is a happy dream, and six is a fearful dream." This shows that people have different emotions in dreams, such as joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, evil, and desire. No matter how fantastical and magical the dreams are, the experiences and feelings that the dreamers perceive are all real. But compared with literature, it has more obvious intuitive and subconscious characteristics, with more unreal and even mysterious colors. In other words, dreams are a special and strange sublimation of emotion. To put it more clearly, under normal circumstances emotions do not need to be translated directly into literary works through dreams, but when the writer has dreams or is moved by the dreams of others, the translation of emotions into literary works must be through dreams. In short: emotions are moved in the heart and formed dreams, or there is a dream and triggered feelings, so the writer will use the dream of love, dream emotion as an opportunity to speak, form the text, to create a variety of emotional dream literature works, so that the dream has become an important driving force for creation.

For example, Li Bai and Du Fu had a deep friendship, and when Li Bai was exiled in 758 AD, Du Fu was so worried about him that he dreamt of him for several nights in a row, writing his famous poem *Two Poems on Dreaming of Li Bai*, in which the author expresses his longing for Li Bai in his dreams. This is how the author could not help but write about his dreams once he really had them. Lu You, a famous patriotic poet of the Song Dynasty, wrote many patriotic poems throughout his life. He never forgot his country and his people, no matter what the circumstances were, and even in his sleep, he was expressing his patriotic feelings, and these dreams prompted him to create many dream-works full of

patriotic passion.

### ***3.3. Dream and Literature Have Similar Aesthetic Characteristics***

The fundamental point that the form of literary works is different from the form of non-literary works is that it has the unique esthetic characteristics of literature, which is determined by the artistic essence and law of literature. Literary works are meant to express real life, but they are not direct copies or mechanical simulations of real life, they are refraction and artistic re-creation after careful design after the writer's inner observation. Here, the writer's subjective imagination and artistic fiction play a crucial role. Art is not the prototype of life but the deformation of life, without imagination and fiction, there is no art. As an art form, literary works also have many esthetic characteristics, such as illusory, odd, fuzzy, leaping, irregular, erratic, transcendent, and so on. In other words, the artistic forms of literary works are always characterized by truth and falsehood, fictitious and real, intermittent, regular and irregular, finite and infinite, which are exactly the characteristics of dreams. This approximation of esthetic features makes dreams and literature consistent not only in content but also in form. In this way, from the perspective of the comprehensive conditions necessary for creation, dreams are more likely to arouse writers' creative impulse, facilitate and improve their creative ideas, and even provide writers with ready-made forms of works. Thus, the writer can enter the creative process as soon as possible and complete the creation of the work more confidently. It can be said that the promotion of the dream to the creation has been the most full and complete performance here.

## **4. The Application of Dream as the Driving Force of Literary Creation in the Process of Creation**

### ***4.1. From the Perspective of Creative Content, Dreams Are the Eternal Subject Matter of Literary Creation***

Material is the first element of literary creation, the first starting point of the literary creation process. There are no clear boundaries for literary themes, whatever the writer sees or hears can be used as literary themes, even those he has not seen or heard, by virtue of his imagination, can also be used as literary themes. Literary themes come from real life and transcend it; similarly, dreams come from the real life of people and transcend it. For literary themes, dreams can provide similar themes as long as real life can provide them.

As a subconscious activity during sleep, the nature of dreams should belong to the psycho-spiritual category, however, they usually contain real-life content, such as food, work, family matters, science and so on. The dream experience is a special kind of life

experience, or a special expression of the universal life experience. Anyone who has ever experienced a dream or who has carefully observed and studied the phenomenon of dreaming will find that although everything in a dream is unreal and strange, and even many of them are nonsensical and incomprehensible, some of the key and basic dream images (including objects, events, scenes, people, etc.) in a dream come directly or indirectly from the objective world and are what the dreamer has directly or indirectly experienced, is experiencing and is about to do, and what is about to be done.

For the dreamer, these illusory dream images are the most memorable, impressive, or desirable and satisfying of his life experiences. Some writers have incorporated this dream experience, which enters the mind and leaves a deep imprint of stimuli and information in the memory, into their literary works, using dreams to create characters, intersperse an exciting plot and unfold a magical story.

For literary creation, the way of acquiring materials is divided into intentional and unintentional acquisition, and the acquisition of dream materials is obtained through unintentional acquisition. Tong & Li (2005) analyzed and summarized the unintentional acquisition:

The unintentional acquisition is the large number of stimuli that the writer receives in his social life and practice, for which, although he does not intentionally remember or intentionally think, they quietly enter the writer's brain and constantly 'invade' him, 'harass' him, which necessarily contains dreams that can be used for literary work (Tong & Li, 2005, p. 127).

In addition, as Liu (2003), an expert on dream literature, said that dream materials had a unique attraction for writers because dreams are not only illusory, but also real, not only changeable, but also implied by some inner meaning, the subject of dreams has certain characteristics that the subject of reality does not have, and it is easy to use and manipulate, and has a special attraction for writers (Liu & Cao, 2003, p. 652).

Throughout the history of Chinese literature, the typical dream texts found in Chu Ci, Han Fu, Tang poetry, song lyrics, drama, and fiction are the strongest evidence of this.

As long as there are human beings, people are bound to have dreams, and as long as people have dreams, there is bound to be a continuous production of dream literature, and dream themes and realistic themes are eternal. The dream of life is the realistic basis and creative source of the dream of literature and the dream of literature is the artistic reproduction of the dream of life.

#### **4.2. From the Perspective of Creative Thinking, Dreams Provide Inspiration for Literary Creation**

Inspiration is one of the most critical ways of thinking in literary creation. Psychology has found that inspiration often occurs when the creative mind has been incubating for a long time and is approaching maturity. It often erupts when the writer has given up

focused contemplation and is doing something else even in the quiet of sleep.

Dreaming is a peculiar spiritual phenomenon produced by specific stimulation of reality in the physical and psychological aspects of people. It stimulates the production of dreams, which in turn stimulates writers to produce some creative impulse and sudden creative inspiration, which becomes the motivation of creation. Thinking in the dream of sleep is often the continuation of thinking in the day. A person who often carries out literary creation, or a person who is blocked from creation and always thinking about creation, will often have inspiration and literary creation in the dream.

Russell, an English philosopher, once said: "When I am writing a book, I dream almost every night about its contents. I am curious to know whether new ideas are born here or old ones are born again. I often dream of the whole pages of a book and read them in my dreams" (Russell, 2015, p. 217).

Austrian psychiatrist A. Adler, in his book *What Life Should Mean to You*, said, "Dreams are part of the creative activity of the human mind" (Adler, 2017, p. 90).

Literary creation in dreams is a common phenomenon in ancient Chinese poetry creation. For example, the story of Xie Lingyun, a poet of the Western Jin Dynasty (423 AD), who was inspired to write in his dreams, often composed poems together with his brother Huilian. On one occasion, when Huilian was away, Xie Lingyun also felt no inspiration to write poetry. At night, he dreamed of Huilian and suddenly got the inspiration to write a poem, reading out two lines in his dream: "Spring grass grows in the pond, and the garden willow turns into a song bird" (Xie, 2022). These two lines of poetry evocatively and vividly depict the scene in early spring, and the lines are so well-crafted that they were highly esteemed by later generations. In addition, there are examples of complete poems in dreams, such as the poet Lu You, who was forced to separate from his wife Tang Wan by her mother's order, after which Lu You was pained and mourned for Tang Wan. In 1203, when Lu You was in Lin'an, he dreamed of Tang Wan in his sleep and wrote a poem, *The Second Day of February in a Dream*, to express his longing for Tang Wan.

#### **4.3. From the Perspective of Artistic Conception, Dreams Provide Artistic Thinking of Artistic Discovery and Imagination for Literary Creation**

##### **4.3.1. Dreams Provide Possibilities for Artistic Discovery in the Process of Literary Creation**

Artistic discovery is a kind of unique understanding that a writer acquires when observing and examining external things, based on the accumulation of a considerable amount of perceptual materials in his heart and unconsciously according to the ideological principles and esthetic trends of his own understanding and evaluation of life. Artistic discovery is the root of

literary creation. Without artistic discovery, a writer cannot find the door to enter the creative process, and without artistic discovery, a writer cannot create unique literary works. Artistic discovery plays a vital role in the whole literary creation process. The dream provides the possibility for artistic discovery in the process of literary creation. The material in the dream is different from the material in real life and historical stories. It is not ready-made, but created by the writer through his dream thinking. These occasional, disarranged and fragmented dream images and dreams are different from the characters, environments and plots of real life. They may create a new image and situation. This subconscious dream is easy to fit in with the writer's inner experience, arouses the writer's deep psychological content, arouses his interest, and produces his sudden insight. With artistic discovery, writers use these materials to express and record literary creation through the language of poetry. Of course, dream characters, environments, and storylines are sometimes simple representations of real life, and such materials attract no particular attention from writers and have no special literary value.

#### 4.3.2. Dreams Provide Imaginative Artistic Thinking for Literary Creation

As we know, the fundamental characteristic of literary creation is imagination. From the original meaning, imagination is to "come up with a vision of the mind," which is repeatedly thinking and processing. In other words, imagination is the process of combining memories of experience and previously formed mental images into a new structure under certain stimuli. The so-called fiction, exaggeration, metaphor, symbol, and others are all forms of imagination. All artistic expression of literary creation cannot be inseparable from imagination, which runs through the whole process of literary creation. Belinsky, an outstanding theorist of Russian literary criticism, said: "In art, imagination plays the most active and leading role" (Belinsky, 1958, p. 109). The ability of imagination is the most essential ability of writers, and imagination is the most essential characteristic of literary creation. In this sense, without imagination, there is no literary creation. It is precisely in this fundamental point that dreams and literary creation are very similar. For a dream, however strange and absurd it may be, is at the end of an imagination. Dreams are mainly unconscious or subconscious, sometimes mixed with a conscious special kind of imagination. Dream imagination is the same as literary creation, and the imageability and fantasy of creative ideas are the same as dreams. For example, in some dream of travel poems, the writer the dream of visiting a scenic spot or never seen the place (fairyland), after waking up to describe it, Li Bai of the Tang Dynasty wrote poems titled Sleepwalking on Tianmu Mountain, Hu Kui of the Ming Dynasty wrote poems titled Sleepwalking on Lu Mountain, and Lu You of the Song Dynasty wrote three poems titled

Sleepwalking on Huashan Mountain. Although the poem title is marked with actual place names, a careful reading of the poem will make you feel that the scenery in the dream is not the landscape in reality but the landscape in the illusion with the meaning of dreams and fairyland.

## 5. Conclusion

In short, dreams are one of the essential driving forces for literary creation, and they provide inexhaustible materials for literary creation. As an essential inspiration for literary creation, dreams are an important creative method or expression technique. Ancient Chinese writers created many literary works through the subconscious and unconscious thinking process in dreams. Some are semi-finished products, and some are finished products, many of which are very prominent and rare in the history of world literature.

## 6. Limitations and Further Study

The major limitation of the present study is that the author only discusses the creation of ancient Chinese poetry as an example and does not involve other subject texts. The depth of the analysis of this paper is sufficient, but the breadth is insufficient, which affects the comprehensiveness of the research results. Therefore, it is hoped that future research can study the relationship between dream and motivation for literary creation from various aspects.

## Authors' Contributions

The first author constructs the research objectives, interprets the research results, and writes the paper. The second author makes key revisions to the paper, determines the final version of the paper, and selects the appropriate target journal for the paper.

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