

Emily Dickinson and China

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ABSTRACT

Centered upon the complicated relationship between Emily Dickinson and China, this thesis analyzes Chinese cultural imagination of Dickinson in relation to Dickinson's Oriental vision, searches for a Chinese critical framework in Dickinson studies, and illustrates the significance of cross-cultural reading and rereading. In particular, the thesis advocates the use of the Chinese cultural resources in foreign literary study, heeds creative understanding embedded within cultural imagination and highlights the epistemic advantage of cross-cultural critics' exotopic vision.

Chapter one examines several important critical issues that have occurred since Dickinson was first introduced into China in the early 1920s, plumbing the changes of Chinese cultural and social environments. The next two chapters focus upon two of Dickinson's distinctively Chinese cultural images—a 'Boudoir Lament' and 'Daoist Vision', and illustrate their formation processes, salient configurations, sociological function and cognitive values. Chapter four employs the journal by Zhong Wenying, a Taiwanese writer as a case study to scrutinize how a Chinese writer grafts Dickinson and Daoism together to settle the mind. Chapter five explores Dickinson's preoccupation with the poetic imaginary of 'Re (homing)', and highlights its resemblance to Daoist meditation that most Western Dickinson scholars fail to recognize. In chapter six, I examine two of Dickinson's hummingbird poems, illustrating how the acts of translation and the cultural backgrounds of cross-cultural critics facilitate the discovery of some meanings that have been missed by native scholars, and in addition, explicating how Dickinson's Daoist-like vision, as expressed in 'Oriental Circuit' and 'Linguistic Non-action', may have influenced her poetic imagination. Chapter seven investigates Dickinson's engagement with the Orient, arguing that her 'Circumference', which resembles Daoism constitutes an enriching part of American Orientalism represented by transcendentalism.

KEYWORDS: China, critical/creative understanding, cross-cultural critic, cultural imagination, cultural memory, daoism, Emily Dickinson, exotopy, intertextuality, translation.

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