

(英文版) 高行健劇作《八月雪》
的話語分析

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF GAO
XINGJIAN'S PLAY
SNOW IN AUGUST

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【中文摘要】

諾貝爾文學獎得主高行健的實驗劇作《八月雪》，改寫自六祖慧能的傳奇故事，是作者心目中全能戲劇的體現。此劇的構思有其濃厚的象徵寓意，也表現出作者一貫的創作精神。作為高行健的人格碑石——精神囚徒的逃亡是飛昇的唯一途徑；在逃亡中，可以得到人生的大自在。

論文中，符號學的象徵意象捕捉，是透過語篇分析體現的。經由劇作中代表性之句式和用詞的分析，作者的敘述轉化為功能語法的系統理解和象徵式的符號學模式。而除了呈現劇作的外在啣接性外，也經由慧能一作者，無盡意—歌伎等的二分概念，探測其內在的戲劇張力與言外之意——一種遠超過「實驗性」的內在特質。品賞此一劇作風格，哲思於焉萌生，或亦即另一種禪之解讀。

(關鍵字) 八月雪·現代禪劇·功能語法·銜接照應·(高行健的)禪。

[Summary]

An ideal theatre about a Zen story by Gao Xingjian is his *Snow in August*. A discourse analysis of this play tells a genre of the drama per se. The analytical steps are as follows: first, to describe the Functional Grammar of the semiotic system; second, to analyze the cohesion of conversations and actions; and lastly, to observe the stylistics of the whole work and of the author. The analysis of the work *Snow in August* focuses on the text and then discusses such supplementary materials as actors, music and the production concepts, so as to create a clear field of observations. We can thus gradually establish a bridge between Gao and the Eastern and Western cultures.

Key words: *Snow in August*, Hallidayan discourse analysis,

dialogue and action, cohesion, Zen

Gao Xingjian (AD. 1940~), winner of the 2000 Nobel Prize for Literature, has written many plays with a Zen atmosphere during the past 10 years. Huineng (AD. 638-713), central character of his latest play *Snow in August* (1997 in Paris)¹, founded Zen. In December 2002, *Snow in August* was performed for the first time in Taipei; it was then performed around the world. It has become Gao's ideal theatre. He has said, "My aim is to create a new and contemporary musical theatre based on the foundations of Eastern traditional drama, an omnipotent theatre of singing, movement, dialogue, and the martial arts." Because the dialogues and actions are necessary parts of a play, we can hear and watch the whole story by imagination through the description of the script, so a discourse analysis is essential for the text and the drama. This paper will use discourse analysis methods to investigate first the denotation and then the connotation of this special work.

1. INTRODUCTION

Snow in August is based on the life of Huineng, the sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism. According to Gao Xingjian, the sources for this "major drama about life" are the *Tan jing* (六祖壇經), Huineng's autobiographical Platform Sutra, and various koans². The play consists of three acts with eight scenes. It moves through 250 years of Chinese history from the middle of the seventh century (High Tang Dynasty) to the end of the ninth century (Late Tang Dynasty). The legend of Huineng is told in drama and song. The significance of Huineng, according to Gao, does not reside in his status as a revered religious leader, but in his inherent understanding of the truth of human existence and salvation, which represents a major breakthrough and "freeing up" of religion. The scenes of the play are as follows³.

scenes (in script)

Act I	Scene 1	Listens to the Sutra on a Rainy Night
	Scene 2	The Dharma Is Passed on at East Mountain Temple
	Scene 3	Huineng Runs Away from Disaster
Act II	Scene 1	The "Wind and Banner Controversy" Occurs
	Scene 2	Huineng Receives the Commandments
	Scene 3	Huineng Gives His First Lesson in the Pulpit
	Scene 4	The Patriarch Passes Away
Act III		Pandemonium Reigns in the Hall of Worship

scenes (the program to perform)

Act I	Scene 1	Listens to the Sutra on a Rainy Night
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¹ *Snow in August* was published in Taipei 2000. It was presented in Taiwan on December 19-22, 2002, and was directed by Gao himself. Zhao Y. (1999), p. 236, has observed: "Gao is the creator of a kind of Zen theatre."

² Gao X. (2002), p.5.

³ Zho M. has said, "Gao Xingjian edits his play from the script to the performance. It changes and becomes much shorter." See Zho M. (2002), p. 101.

- Scene 2 The Dharma Is Passed on at East Mountain Temple
- Scene 3 Huineng Runs Away from Disaster
- Act II Scene 1 The “Wind and Banner Controversy” Occurs
- Scene 2 Huineng Receives the Commandments
- Scene 3 Huineng Gives His First Lesson in the Pulpit
- Act III
 - Scene 1 Huineng Refuse the Favor of the Emperor
 - Scene 2 The Patriarch Passes Away
 - Scene 3 Pandemonium Reigns in the Hall of Worship

In this play, Acts I and II describe the life and spirit of the saintly patriarch. Act III is the embodiment of that spirit among the people in their everyday lives⁴.

2. A HALLIDAYAN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Snow in August, as a play, is a necessary progress from script to performance. But as a starting point, this paper focuses on the text of the script and then adds such supplementary materials as actors, music and the production concepts of Gao, so as to create a clear field of observations.

During the processes of linguistic analysis, I will try to stick to enacting Halliday’s Functional Grammar network⁵ to describe the thematic structure and cohesion in acting of the text. A thematic structure (or Theme-Rheme structure) is constituted by Theme and Rheme. To a speaker or a writer, Theme is the initial element in a clause. It is the element around which the sentence is organized, and everything which follows the Theme is known as the Rheme.

In the construction of Gao’s Zen-atmosphere play, it is composed by Theme and Rheme, questions and answers, etc., just as in daily talk. But during the zen dialogues, some connotations diverge from the path of the clear and transparent and become ambiguous.

The code of the text analysis is below⁶.

T: Theme

R: Rheme

/ : the division of T and R

⁴ Zho M. quotes the talks of Gao, “In order to make this play more vivid, the author arranged for two actresses, Boundless Treasure (a Buddhist nun) and Singsong Girl to become a comparison; the Writer standing for Huineng and Gao himself, drew concern from a far distance to the whole play.” See Zho M. (2002), pp. 96–97.

⁵ Halliday M.A.K. (1994).

⁶ The judgement of Theme and Rheme largely depends on Halliday M.A.K. (1994), P. 63, but the details (of the thematic structure) are drawn from the text of the play.

2.1. The thematic structures and thematic progression

2.1.1. *Snow in August*, Act III

Theme	Rheme
(T1: the Theme of the first clause, R1: the Rheme of the first clause)	
Cao Mountain(T1), quiet and serene(R1), (T)/	A shadow cavorts with the clean, crisp wind.(R)
曹山 (T1) /本寂 (R1) /	影弄清風(R)
Even insensate stones (T1) think of moving (R1) (T)/	And try to send us a message.(R)
石頭 (T1) 希遷 (R1) (T) /	個中透消息(R)
The way of Heaven (T1), They say it's enlightenment(R1), (T)/	It's only a mass of nothingness. (R)
皇天 (T1) 悟道 (R1) (orig. 「天皇悟道」) (T) /	一片虛無(R)

The texts above come from the scenes of Act III. First, the Singsong Girl and Writer sing a duet, in which the former invokes the names of famous Zen masters (which are also semantically significant to Zen symbol), all of whom are Huineng's disciples and their students. In these sentences, T stands for the names of the Zen masters, and Gao translates their names semantically in every T1-R1. These sentences are constructed by simple Theme and Rheme. Together they have a Chinese poetic antithesis, and shows an epic style.

2.1.2. *Snow in August*, Act I, Scene 1

The text below has an interior cohesion: the Theme of “troubles, Bodhi (wisdom), Nirvana (death in peace)”. The thematic progression is : T1→T2, R2→T3, T3+R3→T4. During the progression, the opposite words and concepts of the two actors (man vs. woman) are mixed in their dialogues: “Troubles(T4) lead to Bodhi (R4), Nirvana(T5)/ is the other shore (R5)”. Thus it reaches a state of harmony both in lexical structure and semantics.

Thematic structure in dialogue			
	T	R	
1 Huizeng:	You (Master)(T1) /	are chanting too fast!	(R1)
惠能 :	師父 (T1) /	念得太急了.	(R1)
2 Boundless:	Boundless Treasures am I (T2) /,	Boundless troubles occupy...	(R2)
無盡藏 :	無盡藏 (T2)	我無盡的煩惱啊!	(R2)
3 Huizeng:	The thoughts keep coming, now and then. (T3)		
		they can't be blocked .	(R3)
惠能 :	前念繼後念 (T3) /	念念不斷。	(R3)
4 Huizeng:	Troubles (T4) /	lead to Bodhi.	(R4)
	Nirvana (T5) /	is the other shore.	(R5)
惠能 :	煩惱 (T4) /	即菩提	(R4)
	涅槃 (T5) /	即彼岸。	(R5)

2.1.3. *Snow in August*, Act III

In Act III, the plot of “Pandemonium Reigns in the Hall of Worship” displays active discourse based on the koans. In the cat-chasing and fire-setting farce, with many characters running around the stage, reflect the craziness of the Zen Buddhist repertoire. The major thematic structure and cohesion is as follows.

Thematic structure in dialogue

	T (the ellipsis of Subject)	R(substitution -in boldface type)
Layman A:	(we) /	Don't let <i>that guy</i> get away!
俗人甲：	(我們) /	別叫那廝溜跑了！
GRAZY MASTER:	(CHIEF CULPRIT) (THAT) / IS <i>HIM, THE CAT GUY!</i>	
瘋禪師：	(禍首) /	就是他：這鬧貓漢！
One Master:	(we) /	catch <i>the thief!</i>
一禪師：	(我們) /	抓賊了！抓賊了！
Another Master:	(Whom) /	do we catch? <i>cat</i> or <i>thief</i> ?
	<i>Which one</i> /	are we supposed to catch?
又禪師：	(我) /	(抓) 賊還是貓？
	(我們) /	究竟抓個什麼？

The thematic structure above has an usual style: the ellipsis of the Theme. The nouns of the Rheme all point to the troublemaker — the cat guy. The appositive words: that guy, him, the thief, the cat, which one, etc., become ambiguous as a kind of Zen humor.

3. COHESION BETWEEN WORDS AND ACTORS⁷

At the end of most Gao's plays, there are usually a chapter entitled “On directing and acting in xxx.” His thoughts about culture and writing are clearly expressed in his essays⁸. As the director of *Snow in August*, he wanted everything to start from zero. He required his actors to set aside traditional moves and postures, and start everything afresh. In embodying an integrative vision of form and content, *Snow in August* comes close to being Gao's ideal theatre.

3.1. The lexical field of the play

We have observed many words and phrases in this play that could be classified in comparative fields, and then united all in one. They also became an integrative vision of form and content in Gao Xingjian's notion of ideal theatre.

(1) About “enlightenment”

{ Bodhi (wisdom), the other shore, the attainment of Buddhahood,

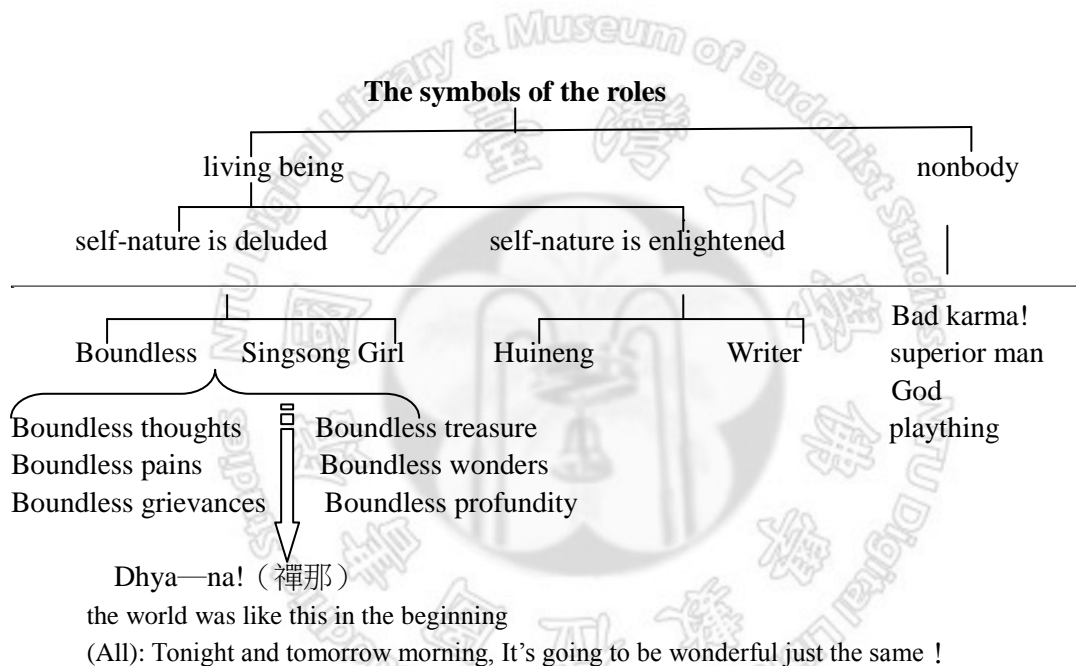
⁷ There are two papers about the text of body languages: LEE V. and BEATLIE G. (1998), pp. 39-92; MARTINEC R. (1998), pp. 161-180.

⁸ For example: Gao (1996) *None-ism*(沒有主義).

- meditation, self-nature }
- (2) About “Buddha”
 { a teacher of Heaven and men, a Buddha, zealous disciple
 great wisdom leading to the other shore }
- (3) About “worry”
 { trouble, thoughts, regrets, remorse, sorrow, bound,
 from one thought to another }

3.2. The symbols of the roles

According to Gao Xingjian, the major roles of the play are Huineng and Boundless. The ordinary features are the Writer and the Singsong girl; extensions of the two major roles – Huineng and Boundless. And it can be translated into these symbols⁹:



4. CONCLUSION

In the paper, we describe the style of the play in terms of its Theme-Rheme structures from simple to complex. We also analyze the play in term of its cohesion of conversations in Act III. This way we see the style of the work as an intercultural synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions: the form and meaning in *Snow in August*, examined as concretely, represent the blending of the cultures of the East and West.

In *Snow in August*, Huineng is portrayed as a thinker, through a Zen atmosphere which pervades the play. Gao also overlaps the images of the thinker and the writer, the author himself and the writer, and also Huineng and Boundless. Gao’s drama as

⁹ The tree is adapted from the Porphyrian tree. See ECO U. (1986), pp. 60-65. It’s a tree developed from Aristotle’s Categories by Porphyry, and is called “The Porphyrian tree”.

a genre can be summarized in one word: self-salvation. In *Snow in August*, as elsewhere in his plays, Gao tries to tackle the universal problem of freeing oneself from life's sufferings (Gao 2002: 5). Zen represents a supreme transcendence of worldly troubles and privations, both for Gao and all soul-sufferers as well.

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