

A STUDY ON THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION WRITING IN TANG DYNASTY RAIN-LISTENING POETRY

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<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2025.1040>

Received: 27 June 2025/Published: 14 July 2025

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Tang Dynasty rain-listening poetry perceives and writes time through the sound of rain. The research finds that poets treated the sound of rain as a delicate "temporal calibration," unfolding across multiple dimensions: rain associated with solar terms linked agricultural seasons and the rhythms of natural life; rain at dawn and dusk mirrored shifts in mood under changing light (morning rain signifying vitality, night rain evoking melancholy); the rhythm of life used rain sounds in different contexts to metaphorize life stages and circumstances; and historical echoes imbued specific rain sounds with collective memory and epochal trauma. Tang poets constructed a multidimensional time perception system, integrating natural chronology, individual life experience, and historical memory through the sound of rain, greatly enriching the artistic means for expressing temporal philosophy in poetry.

Keywords: Tang Dynasty rain-listening poetry; rain imagery; time writing; time consciousness; life metaphor.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Tang poets' perception and writing of the sound of rain were always intricately intertwined with their acute awareness of the passage of time. They transformed raindrops into a measure for sensing and gauging time, capturing the profound resonance between the rhythms of nature and human life, as well as social change, across the dimensions of seasonal shifts, the alternation of day and night, the life course, and even the vast flow of history.

2. RAIN MARKING SEASONAL DIVISIONS: THE RHYTHM OF EARTH'S BREATH AND AGRICULTURAL TIME

Poets keenly associated the sound of rain with solar terms and agricultural seasons, listening to the "breathing" rhythm of the earth through the cycle of the four seasons. This auditory perception not only reflected the poets' deep understanding of natural laws but also constructed a unique temporal narrative system in classical Chinese poetry. Du Fu, in *Happy Rain on a Spring Night*, exclaims with heartfelt praise, "Good rain knows its season, / Coming when spring arrives" ("好雨知时节 · 当春乃发生"). This precisely captures the decisive significance of spring rain for the revival of all things and the sowing of spring crops. The word "steal" ("潜") in the line "Stealing with the wind into the night" ("随风潜入夜") depicts both the physical characteristic of the spring rain moistening things silently and subtly corresponds to the phenological feature of the "Insects

Awakening" solar term, where "dormant insects begin to stir." When the fine rain quietly soaks the parched land around the time of "Insects Awakening," the poet hears not only the rain itself but also the symphony of life: the earth sucking in moisture, seeds breaking through the soil, and all things sprouting. The creation of such auditory imagery allowed poetry to break through the limitations of visual description, forming an aesthetic experience that engages multiple senses.

Bai Juyi, with even finer observation, wrote in *Watching the Wheat Harvest*: "Last night a south wind arose, / Covering the ridges, the wheat turned yellow" ("夜来南风起 · 小麦覆陇黄").

Summer rains often arrived with warm south winds; the poet, through this typical meteorological element, "south wind," closely linked the climatic characteristics of the rainy season (meiyu) with agricultural activities. The "swishing" sound of dense raindrops striking the plump wheat ears was, for farmers, a joyful signal foretelling a busy harvest. The poet elevated this precious experience rooted in agricultural civilization into poetic lines brimming with vitality and deep affection for the land. Notably, these auditory agricultural images often resonated with specific labor scenes, as in Lu You's *Early Summer* ("小荷贴水点横塘 · 蝶衣晒粉午风凉"), where the rhythm of the rain sound subtly harmonizes with the action of gathering lotus seeds.

The bleak cold rain of the Autumnal Equinox and the biting freezing rain around the Winter Solstice also became distinct auditory markers signifying seasonal transitions and stirring reflections on time's passage in the works of various poets. Li Shangyin, in *Night Rain: To the North* ("君问归期未有期 · 巴山夜雨涨秋池"), transforms the auditory sensation of prolonged autumn rain into a psychological experience of spatial and temporal separation. Conversely, the silent image in Liu Zongyuan's *River Snow* ("孤舟蓑笠翁, 独钓寒江雪") implicitly contains the auditory void of freezing rain congealing – an artistic treatment of "sound within silence" that demonstrates the poet's ultimate grasp of seasonal phenomena. These rain sound images collectively constitute the auditory dimension of the ancient Chinese poetic "almanac," becoming a significant artistic vehicle for the traditional cultural concept of the "Unity of Heaven and Humanity."

3. RAIN AT DAWN AND DUSK: VARIATIONS IN THE FLOW OF LIGHT AND SHIFTS IN MOOD

Morning rain and night rain played melodies of distinctly different emotions in the poets' auditory experiences, mirroring shifts in mood under the flow of light. This binary structure of diurnal rain sounds actually formed an important lyrical paradigm in ancient Chinese poetry. Han Yu, strolling on Chang'an streets at dawn, in the fresh description "The fine rain on Imperial Avenue moistens like cream" ("天街小雨润如酥"), captures the faint, nourishing sound of the light rain just moistening the bluestone pavement, revealing the fresh vitality and hope at the start of the day. The poet particularly captures the unique acoustic quality of morning rain – its volume often hovering between audible and inaudible, much like the acoustic "negative space" depicted in Wang Wei's *In the Mountains* ("空山新雨后"). This subtle auditory experience perfectly matches the hazy, indistinct quality of light at dawn. The "drip-drop" sound of water droplets falling from flower sellers' carrying poles, the light patter of raindrops on the awnings of the morning market, together weave a vibrant morning song full of the atmosphere of urban life. This sound

combination possesses a distinct sense of spatial location, contrasting sharply with the non-specific night rain in Meng Haoran's Spring Dawn ("夜来风雨声").

By dusk, Li Shangyin sits alone by a waterside pavilion, listening to "Leaving the withered lotus to hear the rain sound" ("留得枯荷听雨声") (Staying at the Luo Pavilion, Sent with Longing for Cui Yong and Cui Gun). In the deepening twilight, the autumn rain striking the withered lotus leaves produces a clear, lonely, even slightly cracking sound ("噼啪"), seeming exceptionally sharp and jarring. This sharp quality of the sound resonates intertextually with the repeated sibilant sounds in Li Qingzhao's Slow, Slow Song ("梧桐更兼细雨"). Each drop seems to remind the poet that the day is ending and time is slipping away. The poet externalizes inner experience by intensifying the physical properties of the rain sound (such as frequency, timbre) – a technique taken to greater extremes in Wen Tingyun's Water Clock at Night ("梧桐树 · 三更雨"). Morning rain urges one to set out, stimulating vitality; night rain induces contemplation, evoking melancholy. This stark emotional difference in rain perception caused by the diurnal cycle became an important manifestation of the poets' time consciousness. The underlying cultural gene of "diurnal ritualism" imbued the rain sound imagery with philosophical depth, elevating it beyond simple description of a natural phenomenon to a spatio-temporal metaphor.

4. THE RHYTHM OF LIFE: RAIN SOUNDS RESONATING WITH LIFE STAGES

Poets often used the sound of rain heard at different times and in different situations to metaphorize various stages and moods of their own life journeys. This creative technique of fusing natural sounds with life experiences formed a unique tradition of "rain sound narrative" in classical Chinese poetry.

The charming scene in Jiang Jie's Yu Meiren · Listening to the Rain ("少年听雨歌楼上，红烛昏罗帐") is a classic depiction of youth listening to rain – the crisp sound of sudden rain beating against tiled eaves intertwines with the strings and pipes within the pleasure house, composing a sensual feast of youthful indulgence. Here, the rain sound becomes a revelry of raindrops marking life's vitality. When Wang Wei resigned from office in middle age and retired to Wangchuan, he preferred listening to the sudden downpours of early summer. The vigorous "thump-thump" ("扑扑") sound of raindrops forcefully striking new lotus leaves resonated with his broad-minded state of being far from worldly clamor and content with a simple life. Wei Zhuang, recalling the past in his Pusaman, found the sound of the continuous spring rain on a painted boat in Jiangnan to be an eternal footnote to his romantic youth. Through the classic scene of "Sleeping, listening to rain in a painted boat" ("画船听雨眠"), auditory memory is elevated into a vessel of cultural nostalgia. In his later years, Bai Juyi, retired in his residence at Lüdào Lane in Luoyang, sat quietly in the autumn rain. In the line "The sound of rain, rustling and sighing, crosses the river" ("雨声萧飒渡江来") (New Autumn Night Rain), the poet creatively spatializes the auditory experience. The intermittent "tap-tap" ("嗒嗒") sound of raindrops rolling off broad plane tree leaves is humorously likened by him to a toothless self-mockery ("老来齿落舌犹存"), revealing an acceptance and equanimity towards the passage of life in old age. Du Fu, during his final years drifting around the

lakes of Hunan, ill and lying in a solitary boat, intertwined the annoying, chaotic sound of "raindrops thick as hemp, unceasing" ("雨脚如麻未断绝") (Song of My Cottage Unroofed by Autumn Gales) with the painful experience of his own declining health and illness. The rhythm of the rain seemed synchronized with his own labored breathing.

From the joyful downpour of a youth in a pleasure house to the desolate bitter rain of old age in a solitary boat, the urgency or slowness, clarity or muffledness of the rain sound mirrors the different rhythms and emotional tones of life, composing an auditory epic of existence.

5. HISTORICAL ECHOES: RAIN SOUNDS CARRYING COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND EPOCHAL IMPRINTS

Certain specific rain sound scenes, through the writing and dissemination of outstanding poems, even solidified into the collective memory and emotional imprint of an era. After the catastrophe of the An Lushan Rebellion, poets hearing sudden storms and fierce winds would often involuntarily associate them with the neighing of warhorses and the clash of weapons on the battlefield. The memory of war sounds from Du Fu's Ballad of the Army Carts ("车辚辚·马萧萧"), through the auditory synesthesia of "rain sounding like war drums," transformed the rain sound into a trigger for memories of war trauma. This phenomenon of sound association is similarly manifested in Cen Shen's Song of Walking-Horse River ("轮台九月风夜吼"), indicating that Mid-Tang poets had developed specific auditory trauma response patterns.

When the "Sweet Dew Incident" (Ganlu zhi bian), a shocking bloody event in the imperial court, occurred, Li Shangyin's description in Untitled ("飒飒东风细雨来") used the alliterative and rhyming binome "sasa" ("飒飒") to mimic the fragmented sound of the rain, forming a metaphorical link to the secrecy of political conspiracy. More directly, the image "rain at midnight on palace locust tree leaves" found in other contemporary records intimately connected the rain sound of that night with political terror. This spatialization of sound memory finds a parallel technique in Du Mu's Passing by Huaqing Palace ("霓裳一曲千峰上").

In Bai Juyi's Song of the Pipa Player, the line "Maple leaves and reed catkins shiver in autumn sougning" ("枫叶荻花秋瑟瑟") uses the onomatopoeia "sese" ("瑟瑟") masterfully. The desolate sound and scene of the autumn rain at the Xunyang River head soaking the "blue gown of the Jiangzhou Assistant Prefect" belonged not only to the poet's individual pain of exile but, due to its high typicality, ascended to symbolize the collective disappointment of Mid-Tang literati facing political setbacks and shattered ideals. When later literati like Su Shi wrote in The Red Cliff Rhapsody ("江上之清风·与山间之明月"), these rain sound images solidified by great poetry naturally carried heavy historical weight and emotional resonance, becoming acoustic bridges connecting the spiritual worlds of literati across different eras.

6. CONCLUSION

In summary, Tang Dynasty poets, through listening to and writing about the sound of rain, constructed a multi-dimensional and integrated system of time perception. They transformed raindrops into a delicate "temporal calibration," not only acutely capturing the rhythm of earth's

life and agricultural timing within the cycle of seasons but also delicately depicting the variations in mood under the flowing light of dawn and dusk. More importantly, the sound of rain became a unique medium for poets to reflect the rhythm of individual life, metaphorizing circumstances and sentiments at different life stages, and was imbued with profound social collective memory and epochal imprints during specific historical events. Tang Dynasty rain-listening poetry resonated across the dimensions of nature, the individual, and history. With its unique auditory imagery and profound time consciousness, it not only revealed the poets' deep insights into the rhythms of the cosmos and the passage of life but also greatly enriched the artistic means of Chinese poetics for expressing temporal philosophy. It serves as a crucial window for later generations to understand the Tang literati's view of time and life.

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