Vol.6 Iss.1 2025
https://doi.org/10.37420/j.adr.2025.008
Art & Design Research

Analysis of the Aesthetics in Li Juan's Essays, a Writer from Xinjiang

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Abstract:
The magical and ancient land of Xinjiang has nurtured outstanding writers such as Zhou Tao, Liu Liangcheng, Zhou Juncheng, and Yelkesy. Now, it has given birth to Li Juan, a non-fiction narrative essayist with a fresh, natural, elegant, and lively style. With her touching brushstrokes, she describes the unique scenery and local customs of Xinjiang, which are full of aesthetic implications. This paper will deeply explore the aesthetic feelings in Li Juan's essays from three aspects: the perceptual beauty of nature, the rational beauty of human relationships, and the transcendent beauty of the individual.

Keywords:
Li Juan; Xinjiang; Beauty

1. Introduction

In 1979, Li Juan started her life journey from Chepaizi Town, Wusu City, Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. She then spent a wonderful childhood in Fuyun County, Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang, a county mainly inhabited by Kazakhs. Later, she followed her parents to a remote area in Altay and endured a difficult time together with the local Kazakh residents. After six years of hardships, she finally achieved success in Altay City. She not only embarked on her writing career but also wrote many wonderful articles for newspapers like Southern Weekend and Wenhui Daily. Eventually, she published excellent and famous works such as Nine Snows, My Altay, Corners of Altay, and Sing Loudly When Walking at Night. In 2012, Liu Liangcheng, a famous poet from Xinjiang, won the Second Zhu Ziqing Prose Award with his work The Sheep Path. He firmly believed that the land would give birth to a unique speaker just like wheat and corn. And Li Juan is exactly such a speaker. She has a rare literary talent and has been praised as a "genius" by Shu Feilian. Li Juan's works make readers feel a sense of loss, just like the wonderful moments of Xiao Hong in those days. The relationship between Li Juan and Altay is like the connection between Xiao Hong and Hulan River. Li Juan's essays are renowned for their fresh style, which is like the singing of an elf from Altay.

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2. The Perceptual Beauty of Nature

The beauty of nature refers to the beauty presented by various natural things. "It is the category of beauty that people first recognized and is what people perceive as 'good-looking' through their eyes and 'pleasant to hear' through their ears." In her essays, Li Juan describes the natural scenery of Altay that she has perceived. She writes about the spring wilderness, the summer jungle, the autumn poplar trees, the winter snow, a "butterfly road", the snow rabbit just twenty centimeters away from spring, the green valleys, the quiet and expansive rivers, the mushrooms in the forest, and the wildflowers on the Gobi Desert. The beautiful scenery she describes is both beautiful and desolate, carrying the unique mark of the land where she grew up. It is vast and full of vitality, barren yet moving. Over the decades, she has leisurely walked through the valleys and grasslands of Altay, turning the dust raised by Kazakh herdsmen, the changing pastures, forests, grasslands, and winds throughout the four seasons into words that belong only to her. She also records the lives of the grassland nomadic people on the spring and autumn pastures in the Gobi grassland, the vast and bustling Dongkur summer pasture, and the deep and lush Wusai grassland. Here, there is a vast land full of vitality, with an open, fresh, bright, and dry scene. When viewed from a high place, everything appears flat and there are no shadows. Although here the grains are not yet familiar, the roads are not yet familiar with footprints, the water is not yet familiar with wells, and the fire is not yet familiar with coal, it can still make people feel its vitality. On a summer evening, gently caressed by the wind, we like to walk slowly along the small stream. Especially at dusk, the beautiful scenery of nature comes into view. The trees are lush, and the lakes wind like two beautiful tongues, embellishing this peaceful land more beautifully. The scenery along the way is magnificent, with green grass, gurgling streams, and between the cliffs, the ancient tree shadows hanging down, adding a brilliant golden light. Under the trees, the maple leaves all over the mountains are like a fairyland, and the crape myrtles on the treetops are like the steps of fairies, making this land more colorful. When we pass through the ancient tree shadows, go through the ancient archway, and cross the stream, we can reach this magical land. Many evenings in Xinjiang are filled with endless scenery and a romantic atmosphere, making us wonder: Is this still the Xinjiang we have been dreaming of? Yes, this is the mysterious place that breaks away from the image of a land with yellow sand and barren soil imposed by the outside world. Here, you may unexpectedly encounter a river. Here, perhaps everyone can have the opportunity like the "Wuling man in the Taiyuan period of the Jin Dynasty." Suddenly, they come across a forest by the riverbank, "with several hundred steps on both sides of the bank, there are no other trees. The fragrant grass is beautiful, and the fallen flowers are in riotous profusion." As Wang Chaowen said: "Regarding Xinjiang, especially Tibet, it has actually been hurt by a large amount of writing. They can record a book during a month-long journey. How many stories are being told irresistibly, and how much history is being passed down while being distorted." [1] (The Irresistible Legend) But for Li Juan, these are not just a curious glance or a fresh imagination. This is the land she is uniquely familiar with, the place where she lives day and night and harbors tender emotions. When describing the wilderness, the author uses personification to depict the mountain wilderness as a person slowly waking up from sleep, and Yitehan as its eyes, vividly showing that the mountain wilderness seems to be looking forward to the arrival of visitors. When describing the "thousands of sheep bleating together," the author uses three exclamation marks in a row, not only highlighting the loud and passionate bleating of the sheep but also creating a lively atmosphere of the sheep bleating one after another. The boundless Gobi Desert, the vast grassland, the deep valleys, the snowy mountains, the winding rivers, and the bright sky all come

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to life in Li Juan's writing. The scenery here is dynamic and lovely. In Li Juan's tender and scrutinizing eyes, the world seems to be pressed with a pause button. Moment by moment, the whiskers, muscle lines, and shed cuticles of things are as clear as if illuminated by strong light, revealing their true forms. Compared with the big cities with row upon row of houses, wide streets, lively scenes with singing and dancing, the faint sound of music, and bustling markets, this place is pure and bright. Everyone can live here in their own way. It is precisely the poetic beauty nourished by these beautiful natural landscapes that constitutes the unique aesthetic feeling of her essays.

3. The Rational Beauty of Human Relationships

In addition to describing the pure and natural nature, Li Juan has also perceived another kind of beauty in the poor, arduous, and ordinary life. In Li Juan's writing, there is no anxiety of the industrial era, only the ultimate beauty of human relationships, the beauty of nature, and the ultimate survival background. First of all, it should be her cheerful and optimistic mother and the grandmother full of childlike innocence who taught her this attitude towards life. The stories told in Corners of Altay include a mixture of Chinese and Kazakh languages, as well as the all-powerful mother in "Clever" and the clever and witty daughter in "Sharp Tongue." The stories revolve around daily trivial things. Nevertheless, they can still leave a deep impression on readers. Although these are not earth-shattering feats, it can still become a work like Hulan River that many literati admire. The scenes of Xinjiang depicted in it are as impressive as those in the literary works of Shen Congwen from Xiangxi, Xiao Hong from Hulan River, Lao She from Beijing, Lu Xun from Shaoxing, and Huang Mei from Hubei. They wrote about those places perhaps because they knew them, they lived there, and their emotions were attached to those places. Here, there are the people and things she is familiar with, her loneliness and sorrow, joy and abundance. There are people of various ethnic groups living here. Although sometimes they cannot fully communicate in language, they still complete a kind of communication with their respective expressions. Therefore, in her writing, there is the reserved and hospitable Uncle Guo, a Hui person, the generous and simple Kazakh young man, the kind-hearted strange driver, and the naughty and willful Kazakh child Hu'anxi. "The Neighbors" is amazing: Kazakh herdsmen not only prepare delicious yogurt for the camel caravans passing by their door but also prepare the first delicious meal for the new neighbors who have just moved nearby! One of the scenes is particularly touching. Two ten-year-old boys, with their four small legs, trudged through the valleys and deep forests, crossing more than one kilometer of rough terrain and finally reaching their destination. However, their belongings were accidentally dropped. Half an hour later, the mother of the two boys finally appeared. She was pregnant, with a bulging belly, and was holding another blue thermos bottle in her hand. After warm greetings, the two children were happy to accompany their parents. They walked for a long time, but there was no sign of their gratitude to their parents. They still maintained the same tenderness and tranquility as when they first met their parents in front of Qiamahan's house. In today's world wrapped in urban civilization, it is hard for us to imagine such a feeling of going through mountains and rivers for strangers, which is to send a pot of hot milk tea to relieve fatigue and some food to satisfy hunger. In many cases, people don't know each other and are indifferent, thinking that this is a safe distance, but we have thus lost a kind of beauty of human relationships. But all these are presented in Li Juan's writing. It is the sincere and unadorned sincerity that we long for, and it is the warmth that we feel. The author tells stories in plain and natural language, making the content of the article more

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full of the breath of life; using words with regional characteristics makes the story full of rich local color. In "Visitors on the Road," the author is on the Ke Kexianling transhumance. The passers-by in the article "none of them missed the opportunity to come up and have a cup of tea and chat." [2] Therefore, she met all kinds of visitors, including a shy, gentle, cheerful, generous, and sincere young man who helped drive the sheep, an old man with a white beard and his big-eyed granddaughter. Everyone gathered together to drink tea and eat hand-pulled noodles. Kaxi's iron-blue face and wet hair indicate that she had a very difficult time driving the sheep, but after returning home, she not only didn't complain but also actively helped entertain the visitors. In the heavy rain, Yitehan provides a shelter for passers-by, bringing them deep comfort and making them feel at ease and warm. These all show people's hospitality and the simplicity of the local folk customs. Moreover, in the author's eyes, the lamb is also one of the visitors. The existence of the lamb enriches the connotation of the visitors. The response of the adult sheep to the lamb's "bleating" symbolizes the harmonious and friendly interpersonal relationship in the local area, reflecting the hardships and warmth of the local herdsmen's lives, and also showing the herdsmen's respect for life. The author uses words to outline vivid and kind images. Everything is as harmonious as a picture, bringing readers a beautiful feeling of tranquility and perseverance, opening up a new perspective for us on the way of life and magnificent scenery in Altay, and teaching us how to hold onto our original intentions in a changing world and embrace the uncertainties of life, just like the Kazakhs in the wilderness, welcoming every challenge with the warmth and strength of milk tea.

4. The Transcendent Beauty of "Humanity"

Marxist aesthetics is based on the understanding of the "species" essence of human beings. Human beings are regarded as a unique and living existence. They are not only a material entity but also possess a free spirit. Therefore, human beings have both biological and social characteristics, but they also have a "species" existence that transcends these. And what Li Juan brings to us in her articles is such an aesthetic realm of the "species" that is achieved after "transcending biological desires and group utilitarian limitations." In that distant and indifferent frontier, Li Juan delicately restores a beautiful and poetic world with her language. There are natural scenery, real and healing human nature and material nature, as well as some indescribable life fables hidden in the real world. She tirelessly writes about extremely trivial stories, such as how Akbai's mother makes a golden steamed bun, the silly appearance of the young man courting at the dance party, and how Juma asks her what she is doing when she gets close to observe the white steam on the stove and whether she wants to eat the stove. Besides the meticulousness, there is also the exploration of an infinitely vast and grand spiritual world: "This is the heart of the continent, the place on earth that is farthest from the sea. Asia and Europe meet here. This is the west of the East and the East of the West. But here, the real world that belongs to me is only as wide as the path under my feet." [3] Corners of Altay describes a magical world that is vast, quiet, close, real, and direct. The grassland beside me is so brightly green. When I touch it, I feel its real existence. When I pull everything away from the ground, the things that once belonged to you cannot be changed. The indescribable pain deeply imprints on your soul. When you stand and look at everyone around you, you will feel gratified, and you will also have an irreplaceable sense of happiness. Although it is heartbreaking here, it also brings infinite joy. The bathhouse, the locust plague, picking mushrooms, the wilderness, these seemingly boring trivialities are vivid and interesting in her writing. In that tailor shop that does business in the first half of the day and has meals in the second half of the day and is only about ten square meters, Li

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Juan still enjoys herself. In real life, everyone can find satisfaction from it, and here it makes people embrace a beautiful future and feel extremely delighted. The world she describes, beyond human relationships and human nature, communicates freely with the spirit of heaven and earth here, without any constraints. The heart is not enslaved by the body, and all things are one with me. This abandons the ups and downs in desires, restores the natural state of human beings, and realizes a kind of super-utilitarianism of human beings. When we face the boundless starry sky, the ocean, the desert, and the grassland, these vastnesses can immediately inspire human reflection, dispel all ambitious fantasies, shrink into a small black dot in the universe, and we can't help but repeatedly confirm our own insignificance. At this level, the joy of this "species" is directly unified with Li Juan's individual joy. Only in this way can people feel rich and fulfilled, and only in this way can it lead to the tranquility and joy of the soul. This is the true, deep, and highest satisfaction in life. As beauty, which brings neither the benefit of satisfying the appetite nor the comfort of the body, often makes people indulge in it tirelessly and even ignore material shortages and enjoy it. The theoretical explanation for this can only be found in the "species" essence of human beings. Here, the relationship between people and the world is no longer tense and confrontational, but there is a kind of humility in it. People can admit that the world has its own operating laws. There is no complaint, no rejection, and no alienation. There is only the perception and reconciliation of this beauty. No matter how insignificant the things are, they are all poetic and beautiful in her writing. Li Juan also runs through the expression of freedom in it, which is also a part of the Chinese cultural gene. Confucius' thought is to "know the will of heaven" and "not exceed the rules"; only by "knowing the will of heaven" can one follow one's heart and "not exceed the rules". Zhuangzi believed that "Life between heaven and earth is like a white horse passing through a narrow gap, fleeting by." This understanding of the fleeting nature of the human body has made the Chinese people deeply aware of a feeling of life being like a dream. Therefore, they are more conscious of pursuing a kind of eternal spiritual freedom. As time passes, it hides all the beauty and sorrow. It is not there, nor in a more distant place. It is on this land under our feet, and I can live peacefully in the world. Often, when thinking about the end, I can no longer distinguish between happiness and sadness, only freedom, only freedom. This freedom is not only the freedom of individual joys and sorrows but also a freedom based on the essence of human beings. It is at such a moment that Li Juan realizes this freedom, transcends the barriers of life, breaks through the boundaries of time and space, and truly reaches the realm of spiritual understanding that is difficult to explain to others.

5. Conclusion

In Li Juan's essays, whether it is the description of the natural scenery of Altay or the expression of the beauty of human relationships of the simple people on this land, Altay under the sun shines with golden light, reflecting the life colors of each character. She writes about her family's life in the Gobi Desert in Xinjiang, the surging vitality and poetry, and "the daily records that are both affectionate and restrained." [4] "These descriptions make her literary territory far exceed the specific geographical boundaries and time limitations, obtaining the power of extension in a vast time and space." [5] She also records the living conditions of the grassland nomadic people on the Gobi Desert, which contains her true feelings and diverse understandings of the lives of the Kazakh herdsmen in Altay. All these are finally sublimated into Li Juan's personal expression of transcendent aesthetics. This is neither to satisfy the curiosity and imagination of many people about Xinjiang nor just to convey a kind of natural, beautiful, and healthy human nature. It is more like the ideal of "the

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unity of man and nature" described by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. It is a kind of personality realm of "being carefree and fearless while being integrated into the great waves." Just like a small flower that is not disturbed by others, it blooms quietly and freely, astonishingly beautiful on its own.

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