https://doi.org/10.37420/j.cer.2024.082

On the Multidimensional World in the Context of Temporal and Spatial Transformation — *A Review of Research on "China" Narratives in the Perspective of Modernity*

Shijiao Liu[1], Baoli Li[2*]

1 School of Literature, Hengyang Normal University, Hunan, China

2 Lingbi Advanced Vocational School of Technology, Anhui, China; School of Foreign Languages, Qingdao University, Shandong, China

***Corresponding author, E-mail: 2984505205@qq.com**

Abstract:

As a specific narrative form with a deep academic lineage, narrative research showcases a nation's image and thinking in the international community and has attracted attention from multidisciplinary and cross-cultural studies. The book, Research on "China" Narratives in the Perspective of Modernity meticulously unravels another landscape of the image of "China", presenting China's psychological, ethical, martial, and aesthetic worlds. Along these four dimensions, it provides a comprehensive narrative review from history to reality, showcasing the image of China during the transformation era. This book is of great significance because of its innovative research perspectives and readability, which help us to broaden our research horizons and examine the image of "China" from various angles.

Keywords:

The image of "China"; social transformation; modernity

1.Introduction

Literature is a fundamental form that artistically represents the image of "China". In promoting cultural confidence, literary art has the priority to "go out" rapidly. The book *Research on "China" Narratives in the Perspective of Modernity*, co-authored by Dr. Zhao Bin and Professor UM Younguk, is the ninth volume of the East Asian Research Institute series at Chonnam National University in South Korea. Since its publication in 2022, it has received widespread acclaim, further promoting the attention of domestic and foreign scholars to the narrative of the image of "China", which plays an important role in developing a positive image of China. The authors believe that this monograph focuses on the creative psychology of writers in different periods, striving to explore the traditional Chinese culture and hidden psychological elements, presenting the psychological landscapes of the era's transition, the blood-stained martial world, and Lu Xun's nihilism to the readers, which creates a research path that explores the process and implication of literary modernization.

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Furthermore, the monograph conducts a comparative study of the Chinese work, *White Deer Plain* and the Korean work, *Taebaek Mountains*, reflecting the cultural characteristics and national psychology of the two countries from the perspective of comparative literature. This speculative approach opens a new path for studying contemporary Chinese literature's modernity, enhancing the influence of Chinese literary works. Its research perspective holds high academic significance for spreading Chinese culture. Additionally, the book examines the historical trajectory of cultural development, explaining the creative motivations and psychology of writers, linking the creativity of historical novels with the tragic roots of the novel's grassroots characters, and showcasing the diversity of the image of "China". The book begins with the origins of the image of "China". It follows the creative threads of writers chronologically analyzing the internal and external relationships of literary transformation, enriching the important topic of modernity research.

2.Psychological Landscapes in the Transformation from the Old to the New

In the Zhanghui novel of the Ming and Qing dynasties, a type of Chinese novel with each chapter headed by a couplet giving the gist of its content, the narrator can freely enter and exit the novel's plot, leading to a scattered structure. The roles of "a storyteller," "a historian," and "a scholar" as a narrator influenced the fragmented writing style during this period. Aristotle criticized "fragmented plots" in his *Poetics*, considering them the worst because "the plot is an imitation of action," reflecting the characters' psychology. [1] Generally, fragmentation is believed to dissolve the artistic structure of the novel. However, on the other hand, the fragmented structure is closely related to ancient China's traditional cultural and ideological concepts. Fragmentation has the inherent characteristics of traditional Chinese culture. The book identifies several potential narrative objects from fragmentation's historical and cultural background. Among them, the "scholar complex" influences novelists to accept "scattered perspectives," which can be arranged or listed arbitrarily, further promoting fragmented writing. Employing the figures of "scholars" and "historians" from *Water Margin* by Shi Nai'an, the book illustrates the profound impact of the intertwined Confucian and Taoist ideologies on narrative fragmentation.

The novel's structure also bears psychological traces. The book outlines the "psychological turn" in novels, where "May Fourth Movement" novelists adopted an "internal perspective" to depict characters' personalities and psychological depths. The evolution of modern psychology and the shift in novel structure from temporal plot to psychological space signify a key milestone in the genre's modernization. First, facing social turmoil, the writers conduct their political duty to advocate moral values through literature and participate in social reform. Second, it reflects the novelists' self-voice. Based on this, the book uses rich historical materials to vividly highlight that the key to modernizing novels in the late Qing and "May Fourth Movement" period lies in their modern ideological characteristics. The difference between the late Qing and the "May Fourth Movement" is that while intellectuals reflected on the national public space during the "May Fourth Movement", they also paid attention to personal space.

Moreover, the theory of evolution and the new-old time consciousness are extremely important for novelists' creations. The book clarifies the differences between the new and old times, emphasizing that the new-old time is a concept of modern time. At the "awakening moment," novelists must face the future, contem-

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

plating the forward path of time from anxiety. This psychological consciousness is diversified and complex, exploring the history of anxiety. During the national survival crisis, the control of time in modern novels signifies the awakening of modern human subjectivity. The utopian salvation journey represents a spatial mobility imagination, symbolizing "leaving home" to find a way out. It serves as a "psychological compensation" when realizing a salvation plan is elusive, employing visions of a "golden world" and a "civilized realm" to reconstruct and envision China's future. [2] Regarding this psychological turn, the book attributes it to the spread of cultural phenomena such as psychology and stream of consciousness.

Additionally, the book explains the psychological shift in novel narratives from the perspective of social changes. Under the guidance of social changes, time means awakening. In the trend of old social reform, the transformation of old and new can proceed simultaneously, but writers fall into a time dilemma. The exploration of time is circuitous. The social changes brought by the Opium War and the Revolution of 1911 caused varying spiritual trauma. Lu Xun engaged in literature while giving up medicine, stemming from a national crisis and a time dilemma. Therefore, writers' emotions moved towards modernization in the early Republic of China and the "May Fourth Movement". As the book states, the "May Fourth Movement" saw new changes in time narrative, with the awakening of "national" consciousness vividly displayed in the works. Writers redirected their focus to depict a utopian salvation journey, emphasizing time as the dividing line between past, present, and future. The transformation of new and old times stimulated writers' creations. [3] During the "May Fourth Movement," intellectuals, aware of the interplay between new and old times, pursued social progress and attempted societal reforms, actively identifying issues that triggered post-awakening anxiety. It is easy to conclude that the past is fixed, while the future is unpredictable. Moreover, intellectuals are crucial agents in this transformation. Despite the challenges, they led the way in enlightenment and critically examined societal norms, embodying both the exploration and the pursuit of truth in the face of uncertainty.

3.The Folk World of Blood and Rain

Martial arts novels are a form of folk culture. Jin Yong (Louis Cha) is a master of martial arts novels. His fictional martial world integrates history, culture, philosophy, and humanity. "Family-Nation" is the background color of Jin Yong's works, filled with chivalrous spirit, laying the great achievement of Jin Yong's martial arts novels. The monograph unfolds a diverse martial world as the field where the plot takes place. The martial world is a relatively equal, free, and open world. Its spiritual subject is the chivalrous character who acts heroically, symbolizing the martial world's spirit. The concept of "Yi" (righteousness) embodies the multifaceted and dynamic cultural values at the heart of the martial world. "Yi" can be considered various righteousness about relationships between father-son, husband-wife, and friend-friend. With its modern characteristics, the martial world offers a simulated yet profound reflection of a unique cultural image in China.

The martial arts world advocates pursuing social justice, generating conflicts around revenge and anti-revenge. Specifically, the martial world has three categories of "Yi." Father-son righteousness can also be seen as master-disciple righteousness emphasizing the deep-rooted traditional values shaping martial culture. "A day as a teacher, a lifetime as a father," father-son righteousness requires "filial piety" as a benchmark. This concept has a strong traditional color, influenced by traditional values, forming a martial culture. Since the "May Fourth Movement", modernity has emerged as a clear direction that deconstructs bloodline ethics,

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

representing an essential aspect of anti-traditional thought. Breaking this bloodline order and the old social conventions establishes a relatively inclusive and open environment. [4] The principle of husband-wife righteousness embodies modernity more concretely. Modern society pursues gender equality, and the female characters in Jin Yong's works have an awakened spirit, fully demonstrating modern consciousness. Women are no longer subordinate to men. Characters like Huang Rong and Li Mochou have independent personalities and flamboyant characters. Their equal and free views of love that break through reality's constraints are typical of modern thought. Meanwhile, friends' (brothers') righteousness establishes an equal interpersonal relationship, promoting blood relations' disintegration. However, the levels of "Yi" have a sense of hierarchy, with father-son righteousness often overriding brother-brother and husband-wife righteousness, supported by secular social ethics.

Martial heroes fight for the nation, the people, and the greater good. They sacrifice their lives and pursue individual liberation, reflecting the intertwining of Confucian and Taoist cultures. Three main aspects characterize the chivalrous spirit in martial arts literature: firstly, the influence of the values from the May Fourth Movement, emphasizing freedom and equality; secondly, the response to the profound national crisis; and thirdly, the flourishing of martial arts literature. The righteousness of the martial world is the psychological state and character trait of the individuals, while national righteousness is their highest pursuit in terms of values. Chivalry is considered the first criterion for heroes. From the perspective of humanity and ethics, Guo Jing's image in the martial world is the most three-dimensional. In times of national crisis, he sacrifices personal happiness for national righteousness. Guo Jing's endeavor to rectify injustices and assist the afflicted exemplifies the quintessential chivalrous character. For individuals, martial arts spirit is the pursuit of justice, combining the spiritual and physical aspects, embodying the individual's mission and responsibility, and constructing a spirit of patriotism.

The book posits that martial arts heroes' filial piety and righteousness represent the concretization of patriotic ethos. Guo Jing's adherence to the righteousness of father-son ((master-disciple) relationships encapsulates the essence of "serving the country and the people is the greatest of chivalry". This modern consciousness in martial arts novels combines traditional moral views with national missions, adding depth and complexity to the national image.

4.The Rural World as the Lifeblood of Chinese Existence

Rural areas are the lifeblood of Chinese existence; as the saying goes, "Each place has its way of supporting its inhabitants." Land is the foundation of human existence. The gap between urban and rural areas has widened with social progress and urbanization. In the past social structure, farmers depended on the land. With the influx of the market economy, villagers migrated from rural areas to cities, leading to land abandonment. This migration symbolizes a loss of values and further weakens rural power. This cultural shift creates a crisis after the deviation in rural cultural identity.

In contrast, cities offer more extensive resources. The authors use Hu Zhongming's novel, *The Castle*, to illustrate this point. From a temporal perspective, *The Castle* places the past and future within the context of social transformation, reflecting the impact of urbanization on rural areas. The term "the castle" signifies

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

human survival dilemmas and the decline of rural sentiments amid rapid social transformation. Rural culture, now a historical memory, evokes a sense of anxiety as people reflect on the past and face an uncertain future. Thus, the metaphor of rural space and the call to return to the countryside represent a cultural search for roots and a cry for rural history. Amid the dramatic urban-rural changes, rural literature reveals human survival dilemmas and spiritual ones.

The worlds of martial arts and rural life converge to form the fabric of the folk culture. The fictional martial world and the realistic rural world reflect each other, embodying an ideal and realistic national image. Both worlds integrate the vitality of traditional Chinese culture, showcasing the value pursuit of the image of "China". Although the traditional rural world has faded into history, depicting the Chinese dream in rural literature and urban narratives reflects ongoing societal introspection and development. Rural writing provides more opportunities for constructing the image of "China".

5.The Ivory Tower in Modern Transformation

With its long history, China escaped the fate of national extinction and division during the transition between the old and the new. As historical processes progress, traditional concepts are always challenged by foreign cultures. In summary, China's modernization has been a complex and intricate journey, as an enduring form of literary expression recorded many literati's voices during the modern social transformation. The authors posit that diaries serve as a mirror for introspection and self-examination. In exploring and understanding modernization, the diaries of literati offer invaluable insights. Historically, the writing trajectory of literati diaries aligns with China's modern transformation. First, diaries are private and convenient for recording ideological changes. During modern times, literati diary writing reached maturity. The authors propose that "the politicization and textualization of diaries are the foundations of their artistic transformation, and their artistic transformation is the sublimation of politicization and textualization." [5] The authors explain why literati kept diaries, stating that they are not only personal inner realism but also records of social life and public psychology. The freedom of subject matter provided the literati with broader writing space. After the cultural "invasion," national political power's influence on diaries made them public works. With repeated cultural collisions and ideological integration the evolution of diaries, reflecting repeated cultural collisions and ideological integrations, symbolizes the transformation of traditional privacy concepts and mirrors the broader historical push towards modernization in China.

Lu Xun, the most profound realist writer of modern times, criticized social issues through his tragic literary world. Following this line, the book traces the causes of his tragic literature. The grassroots characters in Lu Xun's novels reflect the tragic reality of China, depicting the enslaved and miserable national soul. These characters can be categorized into farmers, women, and intellectuals, with social reality being the root cause. Lu Xun's tragic literature has both internal and external causes. Internally, his personal experiences, such as his marriage being a victim of feudal family systems, show his helplessness. Externally, his work was influenced by Enlightenment thoughts. The first level of tragedy lies in the grassroots characters. In novels such as *The True Story of Ah Q*, the grassroots characters use the "spiritual victory method," showcasing a soul numbed by feudal thoughts. Run Tu's slave mentality fills his inner inferiority. The second level of tragedy points to the plight of women like Xianglin's wife, who, influenced by feudal ethics, dies ignorantly to

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

atone for her remarriage and deceased child. The third level of tragedy is the intellectuals' situation. On the one hand, Lu Xun's tragic literature fights against the void of reality while releasing the despair of humanity through the destruction of values, aiming for rebirth. [6]

Chen Zhongshi's *White Deer Plain* and Jo Jung-rae's *The Taebaek Mountain Range* narrate the tragic history of the 1940s to 1950s. *The Taebaek Mountain Range* has gained high recognition and influence in the Korean Peninsula. As works highly praised in China and Korea, they share similarities and individuality. The authors study the characters' features, opening a new perspective for cross-border novel research. *White Deer Plain* showcases the alternation of new and old conflicts within national culture and civil war. At the same time, *The Taebaek Mountain Range* uses multifunctional character language to depict the "epic" of national division, creating a language aesthetic narrative image. [7] These works reflect class and ideological conflicts, mirroring the social realities of China and South Korea and serving as a rich source for comparative literature studies by highlighting distinct narrative techniques and thematic concerns between the two countries.

Yang Shuo, a prominent contemporary essayist in China, had the experience of participating in the Korean War, laying the groundwork for his essays praising the motherland and recording the greatness in ordinary life. His essays' ideological and philosophical style is a distinctive aesthetic feature. However, critics often avoid discussing his shortcomings. Specifically, his writing, while influenced by political ideologies, may lack the grounded realism necessary to capture the complexity of literature's dual nature fully. During national crises, Yang Shuo's choice of themes still focused on the beauty of nature, rich in color and poetic, presenting a romantic style. His eagerness to convey philosophy through scenes occasionally appears overdone, losing naturalness. Despite these flaws, Yang Shuo's artistic achievements are undeniable. His essays on social changes and socialist revolution envision modernization. The authors believe Yang Shuo's language style deepens the emotional tone of his essays, giving the structure a sense of layering and architectural beauty.

Why revive realism? During the 1980s and 1990s, the concept of "two transcendences" emerged, challenging the restoration of realism's dignity. New rural writer Liu Xinglong, acclaimed domestically and internationally, provided a methodological approach. "New century realism oscillates between tradition and modernity, conscience and desire, spirit and interest, also entangled between rural and urban areas, more prominently reflecting spiritual dilemmas." From "enlightenment," "root-seeking," "history," to "romanticism," realism's critical spirit is revisited. Academically, realism should embody a profound concern for reality. The authors convincingly argue that it effectively addresses the intractable dilemmas faced by the protagonists of new-century realism. Returning to the countryside and "root-seeking" is the cultural bloodline of intellectuals. Distinguishing between new and new-century realism, the authors propose "transcending" new realism by exploring "reality," integrating historical perspectives and repairing the eroded moral foundation. The transition from "re-enlightenment" to "re-history" is a dialogue between thought and practice.

6. Conclusion

The image of "China" is a research topic that requires continuous exploration. The authors use rich historical materials to discuss the transformation of novelists' creative consciousness during social transformation, significantly impacting historical narrative. Drawing from history and connecting to reality, the book uncov-

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

ers the new-old psychological consciousness of late Qing and May Fourth novelists from a temporal perspective. It amplifies the theme of individual autonomy, dissolves the fragmented structure, and explores the hidden psychology of traditional Chinese culture in reality. The book also examines the literati's adherence to righteousness and pursuit of heroism, proving that literary development and social change significantly influence writers. Through their works, writers mirror societal phenomena, further connecting literary expression with the realities of their time. However, China's modern development is tortuous and circuitous, making exploring the complexity of the image of "China". Throughout its modernization, China has undergone self-rescue through reform, revolution, and improvement, showcasing unique cultural characteristics. The nihilism in Lu Xun's tragic literature, reflecting nihilism, carries the historical mission of awakening the numb populace and providing a clear positioning for Chinese society. It is the heroism of the awakened. The world of Jianghu depicted by Jin Yong is dazzlingly colorful. Within this narrative framework, the authors are deeply familiar with Chinese history and incorporate the trajectory of social transformation into the tides of history. It greatly enhances our understanding of the "modernization" aspect of the image of China. Using time as a linear thread, from the psychological shift in late Ming and late Qing novels to the outcries of novelists in the May Fourth Movement, a distinct shift towards modern temporal consciousness reflects the authors' unique insights. Clearly, this also illustrates the visibility of the Chinese Dream.

References

[1] Aristotle, Horace: "Poetics, Ars Poetica," translated by Luo Niansheng and Yang Zhouhan, Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1962, p. 20.

[2] Zhao Bin, Wang Damin: "Spatial 'Mobility' in the Modern Transformation of Chinese Novels," Jiangxi Social Sciences, Issue 12, 2022, pp. 103-110.

[3] Zhao Bin, UM Younguk: "Research on the 'China' Narrative in the Perspective of Modernity," Korea: Institute of Literary Culture, 2022, p. 55.

[4] Zhao Bin, UM Younguk: Research on the "China" Narrative in the Perspective of Modernity. Korea: Institute of Literary Culture, 2022, p. 142.

[5] Zhao Bin: "Politicization, Authorship, and Artistic Transformation: On the Stylistic Evolution of Modern Chinese Literati Diaries," Dongyue Tribune, Issue 5, 2019, p. 61.

[6] Zhao Bin, UM Younguk: Research on the "China" Narrative in the Perspective of Modernity. Korea: Institute of Literary Culture, 2022, p. 200.

[7] Zhao Bin, UM Younguk: Research on the "China" Narrative in the Perspective of Modernity. Korea: Institute of Literary Culture, 2022, p. 226.

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)