

Mo Yan's Reception and Variation of Márquez——The Example of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Red Sorghum*

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Abstract: Mo Yan had accepted Márquez's works, and through cross-cultural transmission and Mo Yan's personalized creation, this acceptance has emerged as a type of variation in Mo Yan's works, showing the characteristics of Chinese national culture and civil society. This paper intends to apply the Variation theory of comparative literary, taking *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Red Sorghum* as examples, to study Mo Yan's acceptance and variations of Márquez from three aspects: narrative, characterization and use of imageries, and to explore the cultural reasons and significance behind the variations.

Keywords: Mo Yan; Márquez; *Red Sorghum*; *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; The Variation Studies of Comparative Literature

1. The variations of narration

One of Mo Yan's acceptances and variations of Márquez is expressed in the narrative. *Red Sorghum* did not simply accept the narrative techniques of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, such as inverted and overlapping time and space, breaking the border between life and death, but combined with the traditional Chinese narrative art of the tales of marvels and vernacular novels and other literary genres to create Mo Yan's personalized narrative techniques.

The inverted and overlapping narrative time is one of the features of the narrative art of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. From the afternoon when ice was discovered to the fulfillment of the prophecy on the parchments at the end, the narrative time of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is constantly moving back and forth between the past, the present and the future, forming a closed structure.

Red Sorghum also absorbs this artistic skills of space-time inversion, but the narrative style presented in *Red Sorghum* carries a distinct personality. Mo Yan mentioned, "It (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) initially shocked me with those inverted temporal order, the artistic technique of extreme rendering exaggeration of crossed life worlds, but after careful consideration, I realized that artistic skills are always superficial."^[1] Specifically, the entire narrative of *Red Sorghum* has a liberal and free spirit. Mo Yan begins the story with "my grandmother's" family on their way to anti-japanese, then rewinds time to recount the death of Uncle Arhat, and then continues to rewind, slowly telling how "my grandmother" became "my grandmother". Mo Yan used this narrative style to build an uninhibited and magnificent folk social ecology.

Another type of variation on the narrative of *Red Sorghum* is the first-person narrative of Mo Yan style. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is dominated by an omniscient narrative perspective, and even the occasional use of Melquiades' first-person perspective or other third-person perspectives is in an inherently implicit way. The narrator of *Red Sorghum*, "I", often tells the details of his ancestors' experiences and psychological activities through an almost omniscient point of view, and adds exaggeration so as to "legendize" them, showing the characteristics of ancient Chinese tales of marvels and vernacular novels. Meanwhile, the novel also uses this narrative perspective to convey "I"'s identity as a descendant and modern position, and also shows "I"'s examination and reflection on modern society after standing under the vision of modern society and comparing the ideal social ecology of folk in the past. For example, "I" hate the "bastard sorghum" and vow to find "pure red sorghum", because it is "the family's glorious totem" and "a symbol of the heroic spirit of Northeast Gaomi Township".^[2] These qualities combine to form the narrative style of *Red Sorghum*, and although they have something in common with the narrative style of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, they have already mutated into a narrative art style

with Mo Yan's personal characteristics.

Behind this variations in narrative style is Mo Yan's adherence to the Chinese folk position and his heritage of ancient Chinese tales of marvels and vernacular novels. In the mid-1980s, with the popularity of "root-hunting" in the world, the development of "root-hunting literature" in the Chinese literary world prompted people to rethink their sense of tradition and national cultural psychology, thus turning their attention to the folk world again. The time-loop reversal narrative style in *Red Sorghum* is an acceptance of Márquez's work, and the characteristic first-person narrative perspective created by Mo Yan facilitates the insistence on the folk position. That means not writing for the folk in the name of helping or replacing them, but narrating as the people themselves, in order to complete the reconstruction of the pure folk spirit.

2. The variations of character images

In the variations of the characteristic narrative, the character images in *Red Sorghum* also shows the acceptance and variations of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Mo Yan once mentioned that Márquez brought him "a unique way of knowing the world and human beings".^[3] This unique way of knowing human beings makes the character images of *Red Sorghum* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* have commonalities, especially in the portrayal of women images in the two novels.

There is a category of women in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* who are wild in their own right, or who are patriarchs. For example, Rebeca, a girl who eats dirt, is a typical wild female figure whose appetite is linked to her love, and she constantly eats dirt to reduce the psychological distance between her and the person she adores. The figure of Ursula, on the other hand, inherits the cult of fertility and has the color of a clan patriarch. She raised offspring, expanded the family home, and continued to run the candy business around the clock in her later years. The family was presided over by her for a considerable period of time.

The relatively closed geographical environment of Northeast Gaomi Township retains the original passions and desires of the folk, and this geographical and cultural background allows Mo Yan to absorb the passionate and wild qualities similar to Rebeca and Ursula to the female images of *Red Sorghum*. In Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum*, the heroine, Dai Fenglian, embraces the above characteristics of the female figures in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Dai Fenglian has exuberant wildness like Rebeca in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and also can act as a clan host and accept the human reproductive cult like Ursula. She boldly accepted Yu Zhan'ao, defying worldly regulations, in the sorghum field with Yu Zhanao free to pursue eros. Mo Yan uses passionate language to depict Dai Fenglian's inner world, praising her burning heart, extraordinary courage and pride in spite of her humble fate.

In addition, the image of Dai Fenglian presents groundbreaking variations. Her love is linked to the regional culture and history of Gaomi. For example, "They ploughed the clouds and scattered rain in the field, adding a patina of lustrous red to the rich and varied history of Northeast Gaomi Township."^[4] Mo Yan uses such magnificent language to subtly link their intercourse with the history of Northeast Gaomi Township, adding a divine color to this love. Another example is "The rainwater washed Yu Zhan'ao's head so clean and shiny it looked to Grandma like a new moon. Her clothes, too, were soaked. She could have covered herself with the curtain, but she didn't; she didn't want to, for the open front of the sedan chair afforded her a glimpse of the outside world in all its turbulence and beauty."^[5] In Mo Yan's writing, Dai Fenglian's gaze towards Yu Zhanao is not just a gaze between lovers, but a sign that women in Northeast Gaomi Township, who have been trapped in feudal bondage for generations, have broken free from their shackles and opened their eyes to the world stage. It makes Dai Fenglian's personal passions and aspirations become a microcosm and a symbol of the historical evolution of Northeast Gaomi Township for generations. This portrayal gives the novel a sense of national history. This narrative art makes the relationship no longer just a trivial matter of a small person, but a representative portrait of a people.

Moreover, Mo Yan also gives this woman a heroic righteousness and national integrity, portraying her as a national hero who died in helping the resistance against Japan. In other words, In the spirit of China's indigenous culture and national salvation, the Márquez-style narrative is transformed in *Red Sorghum* into an ideal aesthetic paradigm that belongs to the Chinese nation, yet is different from previous Chinese female narratives.

3. The variations of imageries

One Hundred Years of Solitude and *Red Sorghum* both use some distinctive culture imageries, and these imageries also mutate their own style in *Red Sorghum*. In the creation of his literary work, Mo Yan gave himself the requirements of

"originality and uniqueness of language; originality and multiplicity of stories; and uncertainty of thought".^[5] Taking color imagery as an example, the use of imageries in *Red Sorghum* was not passively influenced by *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, but was innovatively given a localized and personalized style by Mo Yan, becoming a further element that constitutes Mo Yan's style of hallucinatory realism.

The many yellow imageries in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are rich in symbolic meaning and emotion. The yellow butterflies appear with the lovers and die with the end of love; the yellow train and the banana factory are closely related to capital importation and the sin of money; and the small goldfish made by Aureliano day after day are the meaningless and endless cycle of loneliness. The novel chooses the specific color of yellow to unite all the objects represented by "yellow butterflies" and "small goldfish" with the same color, giving them similar or related moods, emotions and feelings, etc., and finally linking them into a spectacular imagery group, which contains a wealth of abstract meanings: death, ominousness and loneliness.

Mo Yan accepts Márquez's artistic style and also uses color imageries. But when it came to accepting them, Mo Yan made the variations happen. Contrary to the use of color imageries in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to convey the meaning of decay, loneliness, mourning, etc., the color imageries have mutated into a new cultural connotation in Mo Yan's writing, conveying the grief, passion and love of the people in Northeast Gaomi Township.

Red Sorghum chose the color red, which has a unique significance to China's local culture, to create a red imagery group led by "red sorghum". These red imageries have two main types: One is a bizarre red. For example, when Mo Yan depicts Dai Fenglian's feet wearing big red embroidered shoes, he writes, "with their tapered slimness and cheerless beauty";^[6] for the bleak sea of sorghum blood covered with the corpses of the villagers, Mo Yan also unconventionally describes the red color as "glory" and "graceful".^[6] This type of red imagery has a completely different symbolic meaning and psychological consciousness from the "yellow butterfly". It is linked to the absurd darkness of the feudal society in the countryside, and it also accuses the invaders of extreme cruelty and unpardonable crimes.

Another kind of red imagery contains the red animal paper cutouts made by "grandma", "a katydid has freed itself from its gilded cage" and "a deer wandering in search of a happy life";^[7] the sorghum wine brewed by the people of Northeast Gaomi Township, and the blood of those anti-Japanese heroes. These red imageries, which carry passionate feelings and vigorous vitality, are like a scroll depicting the land and the people, tearing open a primitive and vibrant folk space with highly saturated colors.

The variation in the use of color imageries comes from the different color aesthetics of different ethnic cultures. Mo Yan has mentioned: "In my early novel *red sorghum*, there are many descriptions about color, which is the influence of Gaomi folk clay sculpture... This can also be said to be the nourishment of folk culture."^[8] The collision of Latin American magic elements and Chinese folk culture makes the red imageries mystery and magic, but also contains the desire, vitality and wildness of Gaomi people, full of the valor and fearlessness of the Chinese nation.

4. Conclusion

Due to the "cultural filtering" of Chinese cultural background, Shandong regional traditions, as well as personal ideas and experiences, Mo Yan's acceptance of the narrative techniques, images shaping, and imageries construction has led to the variations, thus forming a new complete and unified national artistic style, hallucinatory realism. In recent years, a number of contemporary Chinese literary scholars have brilliantly explored new ways of survival for local Chinese literature in the context of modernization and globalization. In the case of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Red Sorghum*, for example, Mo Yan has realized the "Sinicization" of the artistic style of other countries, with a folk position and a belief in cultural roots. This is a good example of how the Chinese literature can better explore the universal laws of civilizational exchange in the wave of cultural globalization, trying to break free from the cage of Western centrism, turn prejudice into understanding, change the conflict into dialogue, not only to improve the voice of Chinese literature, but also to contribute to the open world literary map.

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