

# Harmonious and Tear: An Imagological Investigation of the “Hybrid” in Mo Yan's Novels

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**Abstract:** Mo Yan's literary creation, with its rich integration of world literature, folk resources and classical literature, has a broad space for interpretation in the field of comparative literature. Hybrid images in Mo Yan's works, taking example of Shangguan Jintong from “Big Breasts and Wide Hips” and Chen Bi from “Frog”, reflect that Mo Yan draws lessons from western literature, also imply Mo Yan's attitude towards literary exchanges between Chinese and western world. Based on imagology, the article conducts the study from two aspects, the internal and external of the text, and Mo Yan's hybrid images will be compared with Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Faulkner's works, to discuss the literary writing of common human life experience, and how the western literature influence on Mo Yan in the content of the literature, then induce Mo Yan's unification of world literature and national literature.

## 1. Introduction

The influx of Western literature created a splash in Mo's career in the 1980s. In all kinds of foreign literary thoughts, the clash of literary ideas and techniques has promoted the meeting of the world's great literary minds. Mo Yan once admitted that the two works that had the greatest influence on him were Garcia Marquez's “One Hundred Years of Solitude” and Faulkner's “The Sound and the Fury”. Mo Yan does not deny that Western literature nourishes him, but at the same time he is not satiated with external ingested. Instead, he urgently calls out the style of “Root-Searching Literature”: “Chinese writer's roots must be rooted into the soil of Chinese culture before they can form their own artistic style and art world, and their roots can be developed and fluffy”. As a result, Mo Yan's literary ideology presents the unity and opposition between the world and the nation. In the harmony and tension between the “subject” and “the other”, some classical hybrid images emerge at the historic moment.

## 2. Text Analysis Based on Imagology

The imagology of comparative literature is the theoretical basis for the study of Mo Yan's hybrid image. In Mocha's definition, this image “is the image of the foreign country, the image of a people, and finally, the image created by a writer's particular feelings. In “Big Breasts and Wide Boots”, Shangguan Jintong is the child of Shangguan Lu's adulteration with a Swedish priest, while in “Frog”, Chen Bi is the child of Chen Er and his wife from the Soviet Union. In the sense of blood and culture, they are both products of the combination of Chinese and Western culture, so they fall within the scope of imagological research.

The cultural hybridity of mixed-race identity can be regarded as the carrier of Mo Yan's cultural psychology to a certain extent. This conclusion is based on Barlow's emphasis on “gazer”. He believes that images are “reorganized and rewritten in accordance with the acceptance procedures in the gazers' culture, and these patterns and procedures are pre-existing in images”. That is to say, the writing of images is “a creative imagination conceived basically according to absence”. Then, when the research focuses on the gazer, the cultural image of Mo Yan, the creative subject, will be presented through the extraction of the mixed blood image.

This paper will explore the cultural significance of the mixed race image from the internal and external aspects of the text. Starting with the words, hierarchical relations and plot inside the text, we can grasp the characteristics of the characters more accurately through the form of language and plot. On the external text, because the creation of the text image is closely related to the historical, social and cultural context, the study of image should not be confined to the internal text, but also go deep into the cultural system of the creative subject. The image of mixed race in Mo Yan's works has melted the social style and folk psychology of modern China, so it can be regarded as a kind of "social collective imagination". This paper will focus on the morbidities of the two images, Shangguan Jintong and Chen Bi, to explore their cultural causes. In combination with the literary ideology trend after the reform and opening up, the author interprets Mo Yan's literary thought of the unification of the world and nationality through the image of the hybrid as "social collective imagination".

### **3. Internal Text Analysis -- Identity and Cultural Destination**

The author will take Shangguan Jintong in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* and Chen Nose in *Frog* as examples to discuss the characteristics and symbolic significance of the images of the mixed race., in my opinion, the birth of the two characters have been accompanied by the conflict of culture, which in essence is endowed with cultural duality: Shangguan Jintong is a Sweden minister's bastard, and Chen Bi's birth was more complex, his father Chen Er got married with the Soviet woman when he was leading a vagrant life in the northeast, at that time, the new marriage law has not yet issued, so back to hometown, Chen Er "legally" had two wives. The birth of the two mixed-race children involved legal and ethical conflicts, and their blood relationship itself brews the conflicts of different cultures, which in essence determines their marginal identity and the tragic fate of their lifelong pursuit of identity.

From the perspective of words studied inside the text, Shangguan Jintong and Chen Bi's names first expose the problem of identity. Both of their names come from the physiological representation of the foreign, such as golden hair and big nose. Such names become symbols of their foreign identities and force them to face up to the issue of their blood relationship. In order to get rid of this unusual physical characteristics, Shangguan Jintong has tried to paint the golden hair black, in pursuit of local culture acceptance. In addition, there is the problem of "stereotype". Chen Bi's nickname from childhood is "Xiao Lao Mao Zi". According to Meng Hua's point of view, "a single form of representation has a fixed connotation, which becomes a ready-made set of thoughts, and then a stereotype of speaking Westerners comes into being. The cliches of "Little Old Mao-zi" reflect the Chinese countryside's fear and hatred of the West. The national sentiment bred from social history is imposed on these mixed race children. The strong exclusivity of the local society brings deeper identity and psychological crisis to the mixed race children, and creates their weak character to a certain extent.

In terms of expression, Mo Yan's homage to Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is the most interesting. The language of Chen's translation dialect is a parody of *Don Quixote*, which is also a parody of the classic romance novels of chivalry, also the first parody of modern meaning. Mo Yan fully borrowed the techniques of Western modernist novels and endowed this linguistic parody with the unique meaning of Chinese literature: the translation of Western literature gave birth to the translation dialect, and Mo Yan once admitted that the translation dialect had influenced his own language style in the process of reading Western classics. In "frog", Chen Bi's translation dialect misfits the folk language environment, for which Chen was regarded as "Don Quixote" type of crazy, but in Mo Yan's literary career, translation dialect's characteristics of emotional and burdensome are absorbed by Mo Yan and eventually present Mo Yan's own language style: Cao Xia summed up as "leading his life instinct of abundant sensibility of heavy and complicated narrative". While displaying Mo Yan's comprehensive writing style, Zhang Qinghua also mentioned "his various foreign tones that transliterate across western countries."

The "foreign tones" given to Chen Bi is not only to emphasis on his foreign descent, but also on the meaning of character building to make the image more plump, after the disaster destroys his

family, Chen no longer uses folk language, which means that he thoroughly frustrated of local identity, but turn to the western culture for an ideal life; Western culture becomes his home, and Don Quixote becomes his metaphor.

From the internal study of the story plot, we will find that Shangguan Jintong and Chen Bi have made opposite choices on the issue of cultural destination, the most prominent evidence of which is the plot setting of Shangguan Jintong's "breast fetid". Shangguan Jintong is obsessed with breasts throughout his life, and even at the end of the novel, as he lies on his mother's grave, he remembers all the breasts he has ever seen. This habit is a metaphor for the return of the spirit of motherhood and the emphasis on the subjectivity of local culture. Shangguan Jintong apparently chose the opposite cultural destination to Chen Bi.

To trace the source of the two choices, must start from the plot, Shangguan Jintong and Chen Bi is in the suffering of life to complete the task of identity, Shangguan Jintong's role in the book, is to act as a pair of eyes to witness historical evil, to saw people's troubled life at the bottom of China in the last century, he had beaten by classmates, parade, painful real life forced him to constantly return to the "breast", his spiritual shelter; Chen Bi and wife Wang Gan once were famous as a loving couple, but in family planning period, his wife died because of difficult childbirth. In reform and open period, his eldest daughter is killed in the factory fire, after the younger daughter disfigured, she became a surrogate mother, Chen Bi was forced into an abyss step by step. Both character also seek for shelter forced by reality, the former chooses the cowardice and escape of "Ah Q" spirit in the traditional culture, while the latter seeks the fearless and unrestrained life of "Don Quixote" from the western culture. Both of them showed the same extreme and persistent toward their chosen destination. They completely rejected the harmony with another culture in their blood relationship, thus becoming social deviants and literary models.

#### **4. The Cultural Factors Behind the "Morbid" from the External Text**

Being in a single cultural destination actually reflects the defects and morbidities of Shangguan Jintong's personality. Mo Yan describes Shangguan Jintong's lactophilia as "a kind of spiritual dwarfism". He owned his mother's love until he grew up into an adult, in a sense that he never really stepped out of his mother's womb. Such life experiences made him cowardly and silent in political violence. Beated by his classmates as a child, he dreamed of waiting for death. When he grew up, he was falsely accused of raping the corpse. He was like a silent lamb, and finally exhausted his life force in the 15-year prison.

Mo Yan endowed Shangguan Jintong with mental pathologies. On the one hand, Shangguan Jintong is just a mirror reflecting the outside world, reflecting the pathologies of the society. Some scholars believe that his breast fetishism is "weariness, fear and rejection of politics and violence". On the other hand, to a certain extent, it shows that the cultural education received by Shangguan Jintong is morbid. Liang Shuming once said, "In the writings of Mo Yan, Shangguan Jintong vividly shows for us all the maladies of Chinese maternal culture: childish, senile, unpractical, passive and ambiguous." As a collection of traditional cultural ills, Shangguan Jintong was carrying the wave of specific era, bearing Mo Yan's introspection of the traditional national character, though Mo Yan's writing is from the war of resistance to the history of the reform and opening up, but his literary veins closely patrimony to Lu Xun. They share a similar sensitivity to the roots of traditional culture, which have been in existence for thousands of years. That kind of lethargy, cowardice, has remained rooted in China despite several ideological changes.

The cultural factors reflected from Shangguan Jintong, should be restored into the historical context, since the 1990s, with the deepening of the reform and opening up, nationalism has given rise to a number of intellectuals with one-sided worship of the traditional culture, they also advocated "East wind against west wind", in the overcorrect ethos, the enlightenment in the new period literature had risen as an ideological trend. "It puts forward a proposition contained science, democracy, the May 4th enlightenment. Actually it is to restore the enlightenment rational." With a sense of historical mission of enlightenment, Mo Yan created Shangguan Jintong to remind us of the nature of the traditional national character and the incompleteness of enlightenment. When the

traditional culture meets the western culture in such a way, it will fall into the dilemma of cultural distortion like Shangguan Jintong: the western modern culture and thought resources have built up the brain, but psychologically there is an almost abnormal attachment to national culture.

In contrast to Shangguan Jintong, Chen's pathologies are not cowardice and passivity, but a radical resistance and a tendency to self-destruction. After the loss of his wife and daughter, he indulged in playing the role of Don Quixote and proclaimed a fearless idealism to society. If Hamlet's madness is the result of political persecution, Chen Bi is attacking on the established order. Having lost his wife to Family Planning and his two daughters to a factory fire, he gave up pandering to the world and defending his dignity by refusing to let his old classmates help him out with medical bills. In a way, his life was the ultimate achievement of Dionysian spirit: though deformed and beggary, he did not take pleasure in the hundred dollar notes "I" gave him; When he gives up the struggle for identity, his personality has been established in the process of social marginalization -- he is as emancipated and uninhibited as Dionysian.

The author believes that Chen Bi's destruction of his ideal kingdom of chivalry is not only the burst of Dionysian spirit, but also Mo Yan's joke on some Western cultural phenomena. In "Frog", Mo Yan has a sarcastic view of Don Quixote's restaurant: "Such a restaurant is neither Chinese nor Western, or a mixture of Chinese and Western." The restaurant became a microcosm of the Western cultural boom of the 1990s, as Mo Yan playfully deconstructed the cultural significance of the so-called "mix of East and West," in which it was nothing more than a commodity to be sold, a symbol of identity and assets. To copy the western culture comprehensively, will eventually lead to the same fate as the Chen Bi. The deconstruction highlights Mo Yan's thinking on the cultural phenomenon of "combination of Chinese and Western elements" in the 1990s. The superficial and material cultural handling does not touch the metaphysical level, so it loses the essential significance of cross-cultural.

## **5. Literary Psychoanalysis on the Basis of Homogeneity**

The hybrid image in Mo Yan's works is not limited to this. In reality, Mo Yan's literary realm is full of ensembles of Chinese and foreign. As a writer with a broad literary vision, Mo Yan's literary style has always been praised as "multi-faceted and rich". Behind the establishment of his personal style is a multilayered aesthetic tenon of "Chinese/foreign" and "local experience/foreign resources." If we want to find the "other" in Mo Yan's literary realm, then magic realism and modernism must be the two mountains that we can't get around.

Mo Yan once readme Gabriel Garcia Marquez's influence on him, "a writer's influence on another writer, is the activation, or wake up from the unique temperament of one's works, to the other writer's potential temperament inside." That is to say, is the inner experience and aesthetic homogeneity, creates an artistic resonance Marquez and Mo Yan. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, Jauss pointed out that "the distance between the vision of expectation and the work, the distance between the familiar aesthetic experience and the 'change of vision' required by the acceptance of new works, determines the artistic characteristics of literary works." In Mo Yan's reading experience of Marquez, the distance of vision of expectation is obviously limited to the distance of aesthetic feeling, which means that Mo Yan's own literary concept is first in line with Marquez to a certain extent. And we can also learn from Mo Yan's experience of growing up, that he have been growing in the atmosphere of the folk legend, red classic literature, if regards him as a heritage of Chinese traditional literature, Marquez as a leader of Latin American literature, the limited aesthetic distance, may be evidence of similarity of the two kinds of heterogeneous civilizations in some aspects.

The author thinks that this kind of similarity is the writing of human common life experience. Zhang Qinghua believes that only when writing from an anthropological perspective, can the cosmopolitanism of literature be established: The original rich and simple folk cultural experience has been elevated to become a human experience with the possibility of cross-cultural communication. In the specific works, the images of Shangguan Jintang and Chen Bi have traces of the common experience of human beings. Their fate and the fate of their families are in line with

the writing of Marquez and Faulkner, which reflects the literary concept of “the degeneration of species” of the three writers.

In “Big Breasts and Wide Hips”, Shangguan Lu was shaped as a goddess symbolizing the earth and reproduction. Her immortal primitive motherhood gave birth to many children, which constituted a huge Shangguan family. However, most of her daughters died in the political struggles, and Shangguan Jintong lost his sexual ability due to breast love. At the same time, Shangguan Jintong's incompetent and abnormal attachment mentality also doomed the Shangguan family to die out. For Chen, whose father was a landowner, he became a wealthy businessman at the start of China's reform and opening up. However, his family eventually broke down and he ended up begging on the streets. In Faulkner's “A Rose for Emily”, this sense of decay is just as strong, as the once aristocratic lady is cut off from the world and finally dies of loneliness; Like the pigtail baby born of incest in the Aureliano family, “only a swollen, shrivelled skin” is left, “and the last man is being eaten by ants.”

The author thinks that, on one hand, the proposition of “the degeneration of the species” is due to the pathological factors in the maternal culture: incest, hierarchy, war, to challenge for the reproduction of life unceasingly, Marquez's magic realism is defined as “expose cruel rule and outside looting evil” to some degree, Mo Yan also puts family history into political turmoil, to see history from the viewpoint of the vitality. On the other hand, from the context of western modernism, “the degeneration of species” also tries to explain that “one-dimensional man” is losing its original vitality. In Marcuse's interpretation, “one-dimensional man” is due to “the negative, critical and transcendence dimension in people's heart is suppressed”, so modern people present deformed and sick images, such as Miss Emily in Faulkner's work, who is pushed into the prison of “human alienation” by the hierarchical concept of slavery. Under the oppression of political violence, Shangguan Jindong remained silent when framed for the crime of “raping a corpse”. This is undoubtedly the most profound criticism of modernity and is also the common life experience of all mankind.

The proposition of “the degeneration of the species” derived from the hybrid image provides a window to understand the western factors in contemporary literature. In view of the influence of western modernism in China, Chen Sihe said in “Foreign Influence in Contemporary Literary Creation”: “Stream of consciousness, reversal of time and space, symbolism, deep psychological description, alienation, absurdity, existentialism...It was almost tried in the immature literature of the new period. But the influence of this system on new literature is always external, and the element of form is present in the literary work.” In Chen Sihe's view, modernism and nationality are limited to the relationship between form and content, and if considering the above “the degeneration of the species”, it can be found, modernism, magic realism inspired on Chinese literature not only on literary skill, they mean to Chinese writers, more in the expanding of the border of literature content.

This kind of expansion, in Mo Yan, is manifested as the input of individualism and rebellious spirit. As a writer who grew up in the Red Classics, Mo Yan's literary views were deeply influenced by ideology and grand narratives. As for the criteria of literary evaluation, he once said, “The Red Sun writes about the pessimism of the army and the frustration of the senior cadres. I felt that he shouldn't have written like that, that it wasn't very revolutionary.” In the 1980s, after the influx of western thoughts into China, the individualization, personal narratives which deviated from ideology, introduced new writing resources to Chinese literature from the spiritual level. In “Magicalization, Localization and Folk Resources”, Cheng Guangwei has this positioning of magical realism: “The landing of Latin American magical realism in China is usually regarded as an important turning point for contemporary literary creation to get rid of the interference of culture and politics. In the content of expression, the long-term discipline of Chinese literature is broken by conspicuous individualism and political rebellion. Mo Yan pour rebel spirit into the image of Chen Bi, he fights against family planning, against illegal surrogate, more against the social order in a quixotic madness, this without a doubt, is Mo Yan's interpretation of Chen Bi's cultural heritage spiritually, his personality is in line with Mr Radar's summary of Mo Yan's novel integrated features:

“in the traditional bones, grow a strong tradition of rebellious spirit.”

Obviously, without the “traditional skeleton”, Mo Yan could only become an excellent imitator, rather than a great writer. In 1985, Chen Pingyuan's “In the Collision of East and West Cultures” made a very sensitive comment on 20th century Chinese literature: “On the one hand, a strong sense of the world and on the other hand, an equally strong desire to search for roots formed the 'necessary tension' in the development of 20th century Chinese literature (and indeed world literature).” Mo Yan's search for roots stems from his thorough exploration of national resources, His inheritance of classical literature and folk discourse is reflected in the reappearance of ghost legends and reincarnation concepts in “Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio”. At the same time, the spirit of Lu Xun flows through Mo Yan's literary veins, and his criticism of national character can be seen from the image of Shangguan Jintong. In addition, his praise of primitive vitality and his conception of an ideal personality also echo Lu Xun's spirit from a long way.

## 6. Conclusion

To interpret Shangguan Jintong and Chen Bi from the perspective of imagology is to analyze Mo Yan's thoughts on world literature based on the viewer's imagination of the hybrid image. Through the internal text research, the antagonism between the “gazer” culture and the identity of the mixed-race people is discussed from the perspective of pragmatics, the fate of the characters is summarized from the development of the story plot, and Mo Yan's learning from the West in the technique of parody is also discussed. On the external text, Shangguan Jintong and Chen Bi ‘s opposite choices of cultural destination will lead to more in-depth thinking, therefore, interpretation of “subject” and “other” leads to different direction: Shangguan Jintong reflects a certain ingredients in traditional culture, Chen Bi on the one hand is the embodiment of dionysian spirit, on the other hand also reflects that the spirit of western culture without modifications is not harmonious with local society.

From the perspective of reception aesthetics, Mo Yan, Marquez and Faulkner show the consistency in aesthetics. Shangguan Jintong and Chen Bi, together with “One Hundred Years of Solitude” and “A Rose for Emily”, share the theme of “the degradation of species”, which all explain the writing of the common life experience of human beings in the world literature. In addition, “the degeneration of species” confirms the expansion of western literature to Chinese literature in the content of literary expression. Take Chen Bi as an example, this expansion is mainly manifested as the input of individualism and rebellious spirit. Taking Guan Jin Tong as an example, Mo Yan's inheritance of Lu Xun's spirit is emphasized. Shangguan Jintong and Chen's Bi present the harmony and tension between personality and local experience, which also symbolizes the unity of the world and nationality in Mo Yan's literary realm.

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