

The Poetic Beauty of Wang Zengqi's Novels through the Perspective of Receiving the Precepts

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Abstract: Wang Zengqi is a writer living in both the modern and contemporary eras. He was a premature and late bloomer, having been published in the 1940s but not becoming famous until the early 1980s. He published his novel *Receiving The Precepts*, sparking a literary sensation and providing a breath of fresh air to the befuddled literary scene of the time. *Receiving The Precepts* is a relatively short novel in which a vast amount of folk traditions components are presented. Using the novel *Receiving The Precepts* as its point of focus, this work concentrates on the lyrical elegance present in Wang Zengqi's literary works. It is addressed from three different angles. The novel's fundamentally poetic characters are highlighted by its versification and prose-cultural dramatic structure, to name the first. The second is the emphasis on how characters are portrayed and how their prose-cultural writing style is produced. The article also conducts a textual analysis while focusing on the way the novel employs folk vernacular. To properly appreciate *Receiving The Precepts'* pure folkloric beauty, it is necessary to examine its three key aspects, structure, character development, and language features. Through his construction of the world of vernacular customs and the secularization of rural folklore, Wang Zengqi creates a world of vernacular folklore with multiple aesthetic values. By re-examining the relations between the urban and the rural, he regards rural folklore from the perspective of folk culture and writes about the spontaneous life of folk characters, constructing a rural world with multiple aesthetic values.

Keywords: folk characteristics, folkloric beauty, poetic beauty

1. Introduction

Wang Zengqi is a writer with a unique writing style that spans the present and contemporary writing times. He published his first book in the 1940s but did not achieve his true fame until the 1980s, making him turn into a late novelist. After an absence of several decades, Wang Zengqi did not rise again until the new age of Chinese literature. In the early 1980s, he published the sensational novel *Receiving The Precepts*, which was the symbol of the author's return to the world of literature. *Receiving The Precepts* brought a breath of fresh air to the confusing literary world at that time. With its fresh and poetic style, Wang Zengqi's great novel won the great praise of writers and readers in the fiction world. To say without exaggeration, this distinctive work is just like a pair of genre paintings when people read, and it truly and vividly embodies the creative characteristics of Wang Zengqi's novels: "In the novel, there is the mood of poetry, the mood of prose, the elegance

of literati, as well as the secular beauty of people." When the writer was young, Wang Zengqi was dissatisfied with the creation of novels at that time. As a result, Wang Zengqi argued that novels should be more "like poetry, like prose, as well as like drama." Even after a few decades, he continued to emphasize the great value of both poetry and prose in the genre for the development of novels on numerous occasions. Receiving The Precepts is Wang Zengqi's debut significant piece just after his comeback. This manuscript is a largely secular Buddhist tale about the joys of ordinary people's everyday life as well as the inhabitants and traditions of the author's hometown when he was a young teen. The fresh and lyrical style of the novel's narrative enables it to break away from the "character-plot" novel model that has characterized Chinese fiction for decades. As a result, Receiving The Precepts has become a deservedly important stream in contemporary Chinese literature. With regard to the author's attitude toward creating novels, Wang Zengqi once said, "I want to write and write for my own enjoyment; I want to write all my novels in a healthy, beautiful and poetic way [1]." "A writer's sense of mission, social responsibility or artistic conscience for writing, I think it is still necessary to be there.....I hold my opinion that a writer's work is to lead readers to care about life, about people, as well as the attitude that provokes people to appreciate life and human feelings [2]." According to his words, it can be concluded that these statements all have one thing in common. What they have in common is that the author's creations are meant to bring warmth, beauty and poetry to individuals' lives. Wang Zengqi did achieve this by practising the creation of genre in three aspects of his fiction: structure, characterization, and language. He has created many beautiful novels with secular folk beauty like poetry and prose, just as Receiving The Precepts.

2. Poetic and Loose Structure of Emotions

As a "popular lyric poet", Wang Zengqi once said that he had a "hobby" of painting [3]. Shou Jie is like a customary painting, which is written in a casual manner with a full range of form and spirit. The novel's simple storyline embodies the author's thorough understanding of life as well as the harmony between humankind and nature. It also reveals the unique artistic charm of prose style. "Buddhist Initiation" (Shou Jie, published in 1980) is a story about a young monk's ordination and first love set in pre- 1949 rural Jiangsu [4]. According to Wang Zengqi, it can be aware that the novel has the mood of poetry, the mood of prose, the elegance of literati, as well as the secular beauty of folklore. The novel's straightforward plot expresses the author's profound understanding of life. Since it expresses the harmony between humans and nature, it reveals the unique artistic charm of prose culture. As an illustration, the author describes Ming Hai's first romantic relationship in a few short sentences, "He was scratching inside due to his feet's flat palms and five tiny toes. The little monk's heart was crossed by this lovely line of footprints." There are few words, and the pace is slow. The little monk's heart was also crossed by those lovely footprints, effectively and vividly conveying the monk's affection for first love to the readers. In fiction, ink and brushwork are used to paint an idyllic scene with a touch of classical charm [5]. Wang Zengqi's various scenes reveal poetic feelings in addition to portraying characters. In the final paragraph, for example, he uses seven short sentences to write about seven different types of things: reed flowers, reed spikes, duckweed, mosquitoes, spiders, loosestrife, and green piles, as well as five different colors: purple, gray, red, green, and white, all of which are full of static and dynamic beauty. This poetic and picturesque reed swamp is used by the author to suggest and symbolize the freshness and beauty of Minghai and Xiaoyingzi's love, and such an ending also gives readers a good expectation.

The structure of Wang Zengqi's novels has always been very casual; that is, he is not in favor of using the word "structure" in novels, believing that structure is artificial and that only drama is about structure. He believes that the structure of a novel should be similar to that of a tree since the growth of a tree does not have a pre-determined design, but the branches and leaves are supported,

and the spiritual work can be skillfully obtained. Therefore, he emphasizes that novels should not be severely limited by the structure and purposefully blurs the line between fiction and poetry in his writing. Zengqi admired Chekhov's novel structure in his understanding of novel narrative structure. Chekhov, he believes, "seems to be completely unconcerned with structure, writing with ease, casualness, and dash, and he has stepped out of the structure, so the structure is more diverse", "often in the middle of a line, frequently unable to stop, the text is natural, touching" [6, 7]. As a result, his novels depart from the traditional novel concept of emphasizing plot, focusing on characterization, emphasizing conflicts, and emphasizing other structural features. Instead, he minimizes the plot and characters, leaving no suspense, conflict, or climax. The emphasis is on the novel's setting and background, which weakens the tension of the characters and shapes his narrative text's loose and comfortable structural style. This is the prose structure of the text's narrative structure. It has a winning mood and a lyrical narrative, and the setting and atmosphere become story elements. Although there is a plot in *Shou Jie*, it is not the primary focus of the work. The author's writing tone is calm, and the plot gradually fades as the words unfold between them. Furthermore, the novel writes about geography, customs, astronomy, and other knowledge, and the picture of life has its own characteristics, diminishing the novel's storytelling and reopening the novel's structure.

Wang Zengqi has always called for purposeless writing. His close friend Lin Jinlan joked one day that his novels were minutely occasional. While the superficial structure of the characters and plots in his novels is loose and "random", the deeper structure is carefully crafted. What is so touching in "Taking the Precepts" is that it is "illiterate". It is said to be "ordained", but in fact, it is about a group of people who are not bound by Buddhist precepts or feudal rituals. The fiction preserves the original simplicity and innocence of human nature to the extent possible [8]. The novel first created an atmosphere: not to be restricted by rules and regulations. In the paradise of Yingzi's little house, the life of the young monk Minghai got enriched. The young monk Minghai saw the temple, which was not bound by rules and regulations. In the temple, the monks kill the pigs for flesh and make money for their wives. At that time, the young monk Minghai also sensed the blossoming of youth in the worldly life of Xiao Yingzi's family. After his ordination, Ming Hai was a full-fledged monk. With his admiration for Xiao Yingzi, Minghai abandoned the idea of becoming an abbot and disclosed his desire for love to Xiao Yingzi. It can be seen that the author's pre-determined structural atmosphere was used not only for the description of the setting and customs but also for the characterization and setting of the characters' relationships in the story. The author's seemingly relaxed narrative is, in fact, full of "meticulous management" of the structure of the text.

The description of the customs, the setting for structure and the frame of the character relations, as well as the use of language in the novel, are all harmonious and smooth. What draws readers most is the intrinsic nature of the text of the novel, that is, the harmony and unity of inner consciousness and sentiment. The novel, in its entirety, creates a peaceful and beautiful atmosphere for pastoral life. This atmosphere is not created for the sake of the surface narrative of the text; instead, the spiritual state pursued by the internal consciousness of the text - the desire for traditional popular culture and peaceful life. In *Shou Jie*, the text is narrated through a prose structure. In the atmosphere created by the text, the serendipity of the shallow structure of the novel is unified in the coherence of the deep structure. Wang Zengqi has reached the spiritual state he is looking for.

3. The Prose Culture of Character Description

Wang Zengqi likes to use prose to tell character stories. Generally speaking, the task of a novel is to create characters, and characterization is accomplished mainly by events (through the characters'

words and actions). Wang Zengqi's depiction of characters breaks with the traditional way of depicting characters in novels. He transplants the humanistic techniques of prose into his novels. Instead of emphasizing the interlocking storylines and setting up suspense, he focuses on the cultivation of characters.

In terms of address, the head monk of the Water Chestnut Nunnery is the uncle of Ming Hai. Everyone called him "the head of the family" instead of "abbot" or "abbot", which is in accordance with the rules and regulations. This ordinary name reflects the duties of Minghai's uncle in the Water Chestnut Nunnery. With regard to living habits, the monks often carried water pipes when they went out to do Buddhist services. They also often held some activities such as playing cards. What is more, the monks ate meat without hiding it from others. They also kill pigs during the New Year, which is right in the main hall. This is very different from the image of monks that people have in their minds. In terms of human affairs, the second monk, Ren Hai, married a wife and the third monk Ren Du was also in love.

The precepts of Buddhism, which were originally the shackles that forbade the desire of human beings, were as empty in the Water Chestnut Nunnery. It is precisely the secular civilization based on Confucianism that Wang Zengqi identifies with [9]. In this nunnery, there was no one who followed the precepts, and no one mentioned the rules of Buddhism. In Wang Zengqi's novel, the people in the nunnery were not subjected to these constraints on their thoughts and behaviors, and they lived their lives in a casual manner, just like ordinary people. The monks performed their daily Buddhist activities; they recited sutras, burned scars, and recited the mantra of the afterlife before killing a pig. At the same time, monks also have passions and desires, and there was little difference between monks and ordinary people. It is just as if monks were simply an ordinary profession for them. It was in this setting that the love affairs between Ming Hai and Xiao Yingzi were not interrupted by the external world. Wang Zengqi once mentioned his view on monks in "About Ordination". He believes that monks are also ordinary people. Therefore, their life is also a way of life. They are not lacking in all the passions and desires that human beings should be capable of. It is merely that monks have different ways of expressing their emotions. The monks in Wang Zengqi's writing were full of human temperament. They were imparted with the character traits of peace and easy-going, which allowed the reader to feel the warmth of the world. This also allowed the reader to feel the harmony of human feelings emanating from them while at the same time wondering about the identity and life of the monks. "I thought a writer's work was to arouse the reader's concern for life, for people, for the attitude of appreciation of life and human feelings" [10].

The most classic passage in *Shou Jie* must be describing the daily life of the three monks in the Water Chestnut Nunnery. The writer uses a particularly expressive narrative description, that is, a style of prose. On top of this, the author also makes good use of concise and evocative dialogues. There is not much dialogue in the novel. The characters' dialogue is almost as intrinsic to the action as the lines in the play. For instance, in the story *Shou Jie*, when Xiao Yingzi comes to receive Minghai, who has just gotten his precept, they have a conversation on the moat. There are a dozen lines before and after the scene. Through a single question and an answer, the two youngsters, who have just fallen in love, are realistically reproduced. Such a dialogue is sparse but distinctive. It shows a rich poetic character. In the whole piece, the author's narrative language, written in prose, is the main part of the novel. Dialogue and narrative language complement each other, thus creating the novel's distinctive characters.

4. The Use of Folk Language

Wang Zengqi attaches great importance to the study of folk literature. The folk rhymes with lively language are often found in the novel *Shou Jie*, which demonstrate a strong folk meaning. In addition, Wang Zengqi uses a wide range of colloquial expressions in the novel. By breaking the

static pattern of written language, the abundant expressions from folklore are not only natural and simple but also fresh and charming, filled with strong vitality. For example, in the section describing the two daughters of Uncle Zhao in *Shou Jie*, the author skillfully adopts colloquial folk language in place of ordinary written language. What is more, with many comparative sentences being used, the language of the novel is original and lively. The simplicity and beauty of the two country maidens are captured in writing, which is saturated with the atmosphere of the countryside. The lines of Wang Zengqi's novel are smooth and catchy to the reader. In one scene in the fiction, for example, the uncle teaches Ming Hai to recite the Bible, which follows the melody of the words with a gentle mood and an inner melody. This is also attributable to his massive use of colloquial folk language, which has a distinct sense of rhythm and melody.

As a dramatic writer, Wang Zengqi paid great attention to the beauty of the rhyme and sound of the lyrics, as well as the prose in his plays. In writing novels, he was also deliberately pursued in this respect. When Wang Zengqi employs folk language, he prefers to choose some superlative words and arrange them together. This gives the novel a musical flavor for reading: "Zhao Dabu is a cash tree, Zhao Daniang is a pot of treasures. Danyang is surprisingly spiritual. At the age of fifty, her eyes are still clear and bright. No matter what time it is, the hair is brushed smoothly, and the clothes on the body are all neat." Through the creative use of folk expressions in his writing, Wang Zengqi makes the language of his novels seem extraordinarily simple and natural. The customs and traditions only made up the figurative state of Wang Zengqi's novels. However, what is hidden in the depths of the figurative state of customs? In short, it is the spirit of the ever-lasting traditional culture of the nation [11].

5. Conclusions

In the three aspects of the novel's structure, characterization, and language, 'folk' serves as a thematic archetype throughout Wang Zengqi's literary works. Wang Zengqi was born in a land-owning family in Gaoyou, Jiangsu Province. His grandfather was a former Qing dynasty "tributary". His grandfather loved wine and poetry and was a romantic man. While his father was a master of musical instruments. He was excellent at painting and calligraphy and had a passion for making all sorts of children's favorite tricks. Wang Zengqi lived in such a traditional and peaceful environment and thus formed his artistic and spiritual temperament. Before the liberation of modern China, Wang Zengqi had served as a history museum member. Following the liberation of modern China, he later worked for the China Folk Art Research Association. He also became the editor of the magazines *Beijing Literature and Art*, *Speak and Sing*, and *Folk Literature*, as well as the scriptwriter of the Beijing Theatre Company. Many years of work which was related closely to folk art had contributed to his evolution as an expert in folk art. Wang Zengqi constructs a world of rural folklore with multiple aesthetic values by constructing the world of rural customs and the mundane lyricism of rural folk tales in *The Ruled*. The writer breaks away from the binomial urban-rural narrative model and explores the ecological, compassionate, and humanity beauty of the rural world with a modern aesthetic perspective. Wang Zengqi has recovered a leisurely and poetic rural world for people, and the rural novel has hence gained a new field of development. In the meantime, the writers of the Beijing style, represented by Shen Congwen, also had a significant influence on him.

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