A Brief Discussion on the Aesthetic Effect of the Secret Field

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Abstract:

The network novel The Secret Field written by Ning Chenghuang (pseudonym) is rooted in traditional folk culture and regional culture, in which the author blends ancient and the mysterious oriental culture and folk customs into this novel and constructs a space combining reality and imagination with a gifted pen, which makes the text become a compensatory field for the readers to explore the historical relics and myths and legends, and matches the readers' psychological expectation of curiosity and entertainment and patriotism, and achieves excellent aesthetic effect.

Key words: The Secret Field; Traditional Culture; Aesthetic Effect

Set in 2035 China, the network novel The Secret Field written by Ning Chenghuang (pseudonym) opens with an archaeological archive called The Apollo Project, which uses a mystery from many years ago to set suspense and fascinatingly leads to investigate the disappearance of an archaeological team of the mysterious bronze sun wheel. In this context, the whole story actually has three timelines: one is the secret military expedition 35 years ago; The disappearance of the archaeological team a month ago; The third is the action of the military scientific research group composed by Zhang Xingzhou, Feng Yan and others as the protagonist of the novel. Although the first two timelines take place in the past, they always serve as background factors affecting the present, i.e., the actions of the military research team, which are the main part of the narrative of the novel and this is where the plot unfolds. The military research team is trying to unlock sealed archives and search for relics of ancient civilizations to solve the great mysteries of The Classic of Mountains and Rivers. From the perspective of aesthetic effect, the reason why this novel is welcomed by readers is not only that it provides readers with an imagination space where the reality and the illusion coexist and attracts people to explore and taste, but also related to its solid background rooted in traditional folk culture and regional culture. It plays an important role in inheriting Chinese culture and guiding the audience to focus on the long history and rich regional culture of China.

I. The Truth and Fiction of the Plot

The popularity of oriental culture and folk customs has remained high in recent years for multiple reasons. First of all, from the perspective of text creation, China has a vast territory and a long history, breeding rich and colorful folklore and regional culture, which provides a
suitable cultural soil for the birth of fantasy novels. The author can extract and implant the historical relics such as Sanxingdui or the myths and legends recorded in ancient books such as *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers* into the works, which not only brings readers a sense of familiarity, but also enhances the authenticity and interest of the text. *The Secret Field* links sun worship with historical sites and myths and legends such as Bronze Tree in Sanxingdui, the Tree of Life in Sumerian, ancient Indian Sun Tree, the World Tree in Nordic myth, the Fusang Tree in *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers*, and so on. The plots of these novels are based on historical relics and myths in real life, which are novel and interesting, but also have literary authenticity through the author's rendering.

Of course, the authenticity of literary fiction is different from the authenticity of life. Fiction is a fictional literary form, and the author will carry out in-depth processing on the basis of realistic elements according to the plot to give them unreal characteristics different from the real life. Events like the appearance of the mysterious bronze sun wheel and the disappearance of a secret military expedition team in *The Secret Field* are fictional, not real. In real life, however, these events are based on real historical sites and myths and legends, such as the Sanxingdui ruins actually exist today, and the ancient civilization of Bashu has also appeared in a certain period of history. Although it has disappeared and become history today, its relics still exist, which is the realistic basis of the authors’ literary creation. For example, in chapter 17 of the novel, when the Secret Wild action group discovered the relics of the ancient Yu Shiqie, “the people of the action group have always regarded *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers* as the geographical history of the myth story, so when a certain civilization in the legend suddenly props up in front of them, they don’t know what to do.”

The Yu Shiqie was originally a legend recorded in *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers*. As for whether it ever existed in real life, there is no evidence at present, so the author extracted it and used it as material in the novel. The legend of “beast body, human face, two big ears with snakes on either side” in chapter 57 also comes from *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers*. In order to construct the sense of reality in artistic fiction, the author highlights the sense of reality with real and vivid detail description, which is mostly manifested in the description of daily life and thoughts and feelings, and pursues the concrete and real details. Based on the author's vivid experience of life and in-depth observation, experience and understanding of real life, the world in the novel and the readers' experiential world are partially overlapping, but not completely the same, becoming the unity of truth and fiction, with both authenticity and story.

Literature and art are compensatory fields to satisfy readers' desires. In this paper, readers can potentially realize their desires and pursuits that are difficult to realize in real life through imagination, and seek spiritual compensation, which is one of the survival strategies of people and one of the inner drives of human mental activities. In this way, novels arouse readers' interest not only in reading texts, but also in exploring historical sites, myths and legends, helping people understand history and reality, society and life, culture and psychology, expanding knowledge and enriching experience. The mysterious and treacherous cultural elements in *The Secret Field* are rooted in the long history and vast land of our country. Being adding into the text, they also get literary rendering and description, and
exudes more unique charm, so that after reading the text, readers will be interested in the deeper source of the text's life, namely the historical relics, myths and legends, and even the whole traditional culture in real life. Thus, fiction and real life have a kind of benign two-way feedback: real life provides the soil for the production of fiction, and fiction has a feedback effect on real life after it is produced. In this virtuous two-way feedback cycle, readers learn about folklore and regional cultures and become interested in them through reading. When the author feels the popularity brought by readers, he will cater to the readers' preferences and dig deeper into the traditional culture, so that the ancient folklore and regional culture are constantly discovered and interpreted. This is the internal mechanism of plot creation in The Secret Field.

II. Expectations and Needs of Readers

From the perspective of readers' acceptance, the popularity of elements such as oriental culture and folklore also highlights the higher psychological needs of readers and audiences for literary and artistic works. One of the reasons of The Secret Field's popularity lies in the fact that it satisfies readers' curiosity and entertainment needs. The formation of literature comes from the need of human entertainment, which is an important way for people to occupy and enjoy their own life activities. As Lu Xun said in the Historical Changes of Chinese Novels, “When it is time to rest, it is necessary to find something to relax. This kind of thing is to talk about stories with each other, and this talk of stories is the very origin of novels.”[1] The mysterious, fantastic and elusive events in The Secret Field greatly satisfy the curiosity of readers and audiences, and meet the spiritual needs of readers and audiences in pursuit of entertainment, which is one of the reasons for its popularity.

When readers and audiences accept certain literary and artistic works, they always have certain psychological expectations, and they want to see something different from real life in literary and artistic works, or a leading character with noble morality and extraordinary status, or a strange adventure, such is the case in The Secret Field. On the basis of integrating cultural factors such as traditional folk customs in different regions, the novel depicts a mysterious adventure story, full of strange and changeable colors, which brings readers and audiences a sensory stimulation and fits their psychological expectations. For example, in chapter 10, the Zheng Shou, an aggressive monster descends from the sky, “and a dozen dark shadows hidden in the clouds finally descend from the heights unbearably and surround the people. When they see the dark shadows clearly, all of them are suddenly tense and afraid to the extreme.” The novel describes the tense and dangerous scene of the appearance of the legendary beast in simple language; In chapter 18, when the Stonehenge showed up, the author describes that “The piles of rocks are cracked, but the rocks remain attached to each other, and they begin to move under the sway of an unknown force.” The novel creates a sense of tension and excitement for readers with some horrible scenes that will not appear in real life, thus meeting with readers' psychological expectation of pursuing excitement and arousing their resonance.

As the pace of life continues to accelerate today, the development of the Internet and
multimedia makes people's learning and entertainment behaviors such as reading and binge-watching constantly show a trend of fragmentation, and the needs of readers and audiences for literary and artistic works are also constantly changing. Network literature has outstanding consumption, entertainment and spirit of adventure, and embodies the spirit of individualism in the new era. It first emerged from the network, an abnormal way of communication. While eliminating the strict barriers between people in the real society, it also brings abnormal performances such as the pursuit of pleasure under the abnormal status. While lowering the threshold of creation and criticism, it has more real experience and expression of reality than the traditional literary texts to some extent. Network literature has its drawbacks as well as advantages that cannot be ignored, such as it greatly narrows the distance between the author and the reader. Literary activity works as a complete system, in which readers, authors and works are closely related to each other. As the feedback of the author's creation, the readers' reading reaction is known to the author through various channels, so that the author can make a corresponding self-assessment of the influence of his creation, and adjust the creative ideas and methods within a certain range, creating a new work. It can be said that the needs of readers influence the creation of authors to a certain extent. Network literature is different from the traditional paper-printing literature, and its growth depends on the large readership, literary text is an object to be explained, with a certain degree of openness, and the meaning of the text itself is the potential. Only through acceptance can it be activated and transformed from potential state to reality, which requires readers to realize. The openness of network literature highlights the orientation of readers' demands for literary creation. Readers' demands can even drive the direction of network literature creation. Once literary works containing oriental culture and folklore elements appear in the sight of readers and audiences, they will attract attention and become popular. Literary and artistic creators (such as novelists and film and television creators) keenly noticed this phenomenon and soon joined in with their own creative enthusiasm, making literary works or film and television works with such elements constantly emerge. Therefore, it can be said that the needs of readers and the market together gave birth to the creation of literary works containing oriental culture and folk tales, such as The Secret Field. They tell the characteristics of Chinese folk customs in the form of anecdotes and decryptions, create a more cultural and mysterious space for readers, dig into local characteristics, and inject innovative elements into the story of Chinese folk culture.

III. The Tendency and Quality of the Text

Literature has a tendency, as a kind of social ideology, it is the reaction of the objective world in the field of human concept, always with a certain tendency, namely, when it reflects a specific social life, it will show or reveal a certain value orientation, consciously or unconsciously shows a certain outlook on world, life and values. The hidden ideological orientation is one of the reasons why The Secret Field is widely praised. When constructing the plot of the novel, a large number of historical relics and myths and legends existing in real life are used as the basis, which needs to be supported by rich cultural and historical
knowledge, showing the author's understanding and love for Chinese folk culture. In the text, while salvaging the sunken ship, the military research team frequently battled with the Japanese, who also aimed to find the ancient civilization, and tried to smash their conspiracy, showing a mentality to solve the mystery of the ancient Chinese culture and protect and inherit it. As Hugo said, “It certainly does the poet no harm to be a great servant. Because it was his job to be the voice of the people.” [2] A author should have a strong sense of responsibility for the country, the people and the society. Their works should reflect the reality of the society and the will of the people, and encourage people to unite and make progress. In chapter 31 of the novel, the Secret Wild action group found the bones of the missing archaeological team, but they could not bring their bones back to their hometown for burial. “Zhang Xingzhou personally collected the military tags of the sacrificed team members and ordered his men to bury them in the empty place beside the ruins.” Martyrs are buried in an alien land and the loyal souls never return home are the usual plots of classical novels, which are deeply patriotic and romantic, and always leave readers with endless feelings. They can also be said to be an expression of the author's true deep patriotic feelings.

Back to the text itself, from the perspective of the form of text, a literary work that is popular, is not just that its chosen subject matter is all the rage or that it caters well to readers and markets, more importantly, it lies in the superiority of the aesthetic quality of the literary work itself, whether there is a complete story, a distinctive character, a thrilling plot and a typical environment, which are essential elements for the novel to attract readers. The Secret Field takes the search and rescue of the missing expedition team as the breakthrough point and the exploration of the unearthed clues of ancient civilization as the main line. A military scientific research team decrypts archives, enters a strange area, and seeks the relic of ancient civilization, during which the scientific research team frequently battled with the Japanese who are salvaging sunken ships on the surface but actually looking for the ancient civilization. Finally, they successfully smashed enemy's plot, and solved a huge mystery in the ancient book The Classic of Mountains and Rivers. The author interprets many strange phenomena and secrets such as Sanxingdui, Bashu and underground world with brilliant writing. In this process, the members of the military scientific research team, as the protagonist, experience a period of ups and downs of adventure. The complete story makes a mysterious and fantastic world created. In the aspect of character shaping, the character images in The Secret Field are also full. For example, the heroine Feng Yan, as the daughter of the missing archaeologist Feng Jiamu, makes up her mind after learning the mystery of her own bloodline. “She thinks that it is necessary to finish the path her father has not finished and try to explore the mystery of her own bloodline.” She accepts the trainings of the special forces with confidence. In the process of looking for her father and exploring ruins, she experienced many setbacks, sometimes frustrated, but she always sticks to her initial aspiration, inherits her father's ambition, and continues to grow. At first, she needed to be protected by her companions, but later she began to take the initiative to protect her companions and became a calm and determined archaeologist. This character constantly becomes perfect in the whole story.

Literature has a variety of values and functions. It is an aesthetic art, which can satisfy people's aesthetic needs, let people enter the aesthetic realm, and obtain emotional pleasure
and spiritual satisfaction. *The Secret Field* constructs a fantastic adventure world, and brings readers great aesthetic satisfaction. For example, in the chapter 8 of the novel, the author uses the legend of Sanzu no Kawa, and equinox flower to create a weird and mysterious atmosphere for the research team. “They don’t know whether it is an illusion, or something special in there that suggests they step into this field, but they detect that the fog and miasma diffused at the crossing appears to be slowly away.” While reading, the readers will experience beauty in the mysterious fantasy space, feel happy and free, just as they will follow the adventure of the military scientific research team. As Zhu Guangqian said in the *On “Imposing manner” and “Verve” of Poetry from a Physiological Point of View*, “when we contact foreign objects with our eyes and ears, if the mental and physical efforts required are in line with the natural physiological rhythm, we will feel happy.” [3]

In short, *The Secret Field* is rooted in traditional folk culture and regional culture. It constructs a space combining reality and imagination with a gifted pen, provides readers with imagination space for reflection and taste, and greatly meets the psychological expectation and emotional needs of readers. It plays an important role in inheriting Chinese culture and guiding the audience to focus on the long history and rich regional culture of China.

References:

