

Marginal Man to the World —— Research on Zechen Xu's Novels

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Abstract. This study describes and refines the theme of “marginal people going to the World” in Zechen Xu's novel. It analyzes the artistic characteristics of the novel including its Idealism, narrative mode of returning to the hometown, and language style to demonstrate the author's care for the marginalized groups in the process of urbanization. It also reveals modern people's imagination of faraway places and the unknown from the unique perspective of “Going to the World”. The author's unique perspective of “going to the world” reveals modern people's imagination of faraway places and the unknown. The “departure” and “return” of the minor characters show a noble spiritual direction and soul-shaping. This direction different from that of post-70s writers, it serves as inspiration for young people in the new era to pursue the value of their own lives, redemption and self-growth. It is also inspirational for young people in the post-epidemic era, which is characterized by economic downturn, employment difficulties, educational attainment, and the lack of education. It is also of great value to the young and middle-aged groups in the post-epidemic era, who are experiencing economic downturn, employment difficulties, and depreciation of education, in order to get rid of spiritual problems such as confusion, impatience, anxiety, and rootlessness.

Keywords: Zechen Xu, marginalized people, world.

1. Introduction

Zechen Xu, a famous post-70s writer, is the winner of the Mao Dun Literature Prize, Lu Xun Literature Prize and other awards. At present, the academic community generally categorizes the themes of Zechen Xu's novels into three categories: “Beijing Drift”, “Hometown”, and “Enigma”. At present, scholars generally classify the themes of Zechen Xu's novels into three categories: “Beijing Drift”, “Hometown”, and “Enigma”. The connotation of the study focuses on the three perspectives of the city and the people, the hometown and the people, and people's spiritual quest and self-help. Furthermore, they derive from a large number of detailed discussions on the growth, drifting, and beliefs, etc. The study of the novel's narrative structure and art, as well as the analysis of the group of writers between Zechen Xu and the post-70s writers, have also become a key focus of attention for scholars. In addition, the study of the novel's narrative structure and art, and the analysis of Zechen Xu and the post-1970s writers" group are also the focus of scholars, while the theme of “marginalized people going to the world”, which is the center of the research of this article, has been less researched. Combined with the current social status quo, in the rapid development of the urbanization process, the novels that can truly reflect the current state of affairs and convey the voice of the times to tell the story of our contemporary times are fewer in number. The complex realities of well-known writers joining colleges and universities, and critics and writers working hand in hand have led to a lack of works that are true portrayals of marginalized characters. Meanwhile, since the end of the 19th century, only a handful of well-born people have been able to move and be displaced to a truly ideal faraway place, while the imagination of the world and other places has always been everyone's longing and ideal. Writer Zechen Xu keenly captures the problems and opportunities in the development, pays attention to the survival of the marginalized groups, cares about people's general desire for faraway places, and explores “marginalized people going to the world”.

This paper aims to study the theme of “The Marginal Man Goes to the World”. It refines the unique perspective, care, and artistic expression of Xu Zechen's novels, exposing modern people's

imagination for the faraway and the unknown, and their connection with the world. It is of great value in structuring binary oppositions, exploring modernity, and inspiring the youth of today.

2. The "Marginalized" and the "World"

2.1. The Marginalized

Zechen Xu's novels focus on the mould of "marginalized people" in the process of urbanization. Whether it is Pingyang Chu, Songpo Yu, Fuxiao Qin or Dongyu Luo, they leave their hometowns and go to the city, becoming outsiders and drifters in their ideal worlds. They desperately want to integrate into the world but fail to be recognized by the big cities. They attempt to redeem themselves by running away, but fail to return to their hometowns with a real sense of peace of mind. Facing the dual perplexities of survival and spirituality, they are in the midst of leaving and returning to their hometowns in search of their own selves. They are round characters very different from the orthodox heroes, imperfect with flaws and even mental defects, with dual personalities, walking between justice and injustice. In the waves of the times they are very small and even engulfed, but for the sake of their own ideals, the faith in their hearts to charge forward without hesitation. Even though the outside world is changing, they always stick to their heart, and look for the spirit of breakthrough persistence, even if bad, but also bad frank and sincere.

2.2. The World

Zechen Xu's "Going to the World" is an eternal topic, and "the world" is rich in connotations. Firstly, it refers to the area outside of the hometown, the big city that people on the periphery aspire to. It is the Beijing that the protagonist of *Ah, Beijing* tries hard to integrate into but is eventually abandoned, and the Jerusalem that Pingyang Chou leaves his hometown to try to complete his self-redemption in *Jerusalem*. Another more specific layer refers to the original hometown. In *Jerusalem*, the four main characters all return to the "flower street" of their childhood after running away, and since then, In *King City Like the Sea*, it is even closer, as Songpo Yu returns to his hometown from abroad. Such a return is not only a return in the geographical sense, but also in the psychological sense. After running away, they realize that a certain point in the past has always been too much for them to let go of, and they walk toward their past selves. Going to the world may seem contrary, but it is not. This kind of going back is not a kind of retrogression, but solving the problem of one's own future, which is another sense of leaving, and returning to one's hometown is another sense of "going to the world", and one's hometown is the world [1].

Thus, "going to the world" is not only a kind of displacement of the body in space, but also a kind of transformation of identity between "hometown" and "other place". It demonstrates the mobility of modern society. The concept and action itself imply the poetic imagination and philosophical meaning of "living elsewhere", which has become the normal life and the basic social reality of Chinese youth [2]. At the same time, the thought of "hometown is the world" reflects the author's exploration of the deconstruction of the dichotomy between urban and rural areas, and between the world and the individual.

3. The Writing Strategy of Marginalized People Going to the World

3.1. Idealistic Characterization and Writing Style

The behaviors of marginalized people such as sticking to the beginning, transcending themselves, overcoming mediocrity, moving towards success and achieving happiness can be regarded as idealistic behaviors [3]. In *Ah, Beijing*, even though the main character is small, he still has a great dream, even though he is not integrated by the world, he still has the courage to fight, and even though he is still abandoned by the "world" in Beijing, the process of pursuing the ideal is very romantic in terms of firmness, courage and righteousness. In *Jerusalem*, the four main characters have been

carrying a cross for many years because they witnessed the death of their best friend in their childhood and failed to save him in time. Even though time passes and the world changes, their inner perseverance is always there, and they retain a clear sense of self, with the self-awareness of searching for psychological identity and identity. In addition, there is no lack of fringe people, such as Chang'an Yi, Hongqi Bian engaged in selling fake certificates in the secular sense of the bad guys, but in the author's writing but is so honest and true. They will not make the reader feel disgust but understand. So that the frank and open character images have extremely idealistic color.

Most of the women in *Borderline People* have the modern female character of "becoming herself", with the aesthetic ideals of simplicity, infatuation, and gentleness. For example, the heroine in Juyan's journey from "searching for her husband for thousands of miles" to entering society independently is a typical model of modern women's self-awakening. Dongyu Luo in *King City Like the Sea* comes from a humble background but manages to establish herself in Beijing by virtue of her fine qualities and outstanding abilities [4]. In *Jerusalem*, Xiu Shu's infatuation, virtuous and excellent and Fuxiao Qin's kindness and bravery are as full of truth and beauty just as her grandmother, a near-perfect person. In addition, there are also the "enigma women" proposed by Weizhao Li in his paper *Gender Consciousness and Aesthetic Setting: On the Enigma Women in Zechen Xu's Novels*, all of whom are ideal women from a male perspective, and all of them are idealistic personalities.

Skipping the economic plight that is heavily emphasized in most novels, Zechen Xu's portrayal of marginalized people in their exploration of the world reflects less material deprivation. He focuses on the redemption of the spiritual world and the pursuit of faith." The abundance and poverty of material life have never been the focus of my concern; what I am interested in is the inner workings of the characters, the relationship between them and the life they are in [5]. "Unlike some writers" numb and indifferent urban characters and the bitter Chinese narrative, Zechen Xu does not examine human actions and emotions from the perspective of class analysis, but focuses on the part of reality he sees and experiences, focusing on the pure, everyday state of contemporary Chinese people's existence, and on the characters who are more characteristic of the spirit of this generation of Chinese people. The marginalized people in the novel have diverse identities and their own shortcomings in character. However, the author does not subjectively criticize or praise any character for any behavior, but rather understands them very seriously and puts himself in their shoes, respecting the dignity of the novel's characters. Measuring the situation of the minor characters with an even eye, he writes calmly about their struggles and struggles, their small sorrows and joys and small blessings, and the normality of life at the bottom. There are romantic emotions, buddies and righteousness, bitterness and joy, as well as tears and helplessness. Although it is written in gray life, it is full of the bright colors of life. The writing is full of tension, realizing the transcendence of the writing of the lower class. There are romantic emotions, brotherhood, bitterness and joy, tears and helplessness in this book. Although the writing is about a gray life, it is full of the bright colors of life. Quite full of tension in the writing, realizing the transcendence of the bottom of the writing.

3.2. Zechen Xuized Narrative Modes of Homecoming

Xun Lu's model of "leaving - returning - leaving again" has become an important topic in the history of literature, and has been used by Congwen Shen and other later writers, and Liqun Qian called it the "homecoming narrative" model. The difference is that, while previous writers mostly criticized the original township, Zechen Xu's strokes are gentle with a sense of helplessness, and Flower Street, which exists like a spiritual original township, is not a gloomy, horrible, and cannibalistic antagonistic situation, but rather a soft and peaceful harbor. The marginalized are actively choosing to leave, not being forced out by their hometown. In *Jerusalem*, Fuxiao Qin puts down her heavy spiritual shackles and stops running away after many years, accepts the imperfection of life and human nature, and faces her painful past head-on. In *Jerusalem*, Fuxiao Qin let go of her heavy spiritual shackles after many years and stopped running away. She chooses to accept that life and human nature are imperfect, and to face her painful past head-on. She returned to her hometown, which she had not contacted for 16 years, with her child Tianshi, who looks like Tian Zhi, and lived

next to the canal. She faces life and death with humility, tolerance, sincerity and openness, and everything that may happen to her in life, just as her grandmother Qin Huan accepted her status as a prostitute and lived bravely in the world, and it was her hometown that enabled her to complete her self-redemption. Her grandmother, Qin Huan, accepted her status as a prostitute and lived bravely in the world, and it was her hometown that enabled her to complete her self-redemption.

3.2.1 The Land of Return--Homeland

In Zechen Xu's novels, the place of return, the original countryside, is mainly "Flower Street", a utopia of the literary world constructed in words for the real world. It is located in a pre-modern context and represents an agricultural civilization, which helps to contrast it with the modern context and industrial civilization represented by the world to which the marginalized aspire. Moreover, the special geographical location next to the Grand Canal helps to grasp society and life in a panoramic way, placing the marginalized people in a grand background. The marginalized people in "Going North" pursue along the canal, achieving the double vibration of the sense of uncertainty of individual life and the sense of heavy history, manifesting the rise and fall of the family and the nation.

3.2.2 Departure from the Place--World

On the surface, although the world is a modern city with Beijing as the typical big city, in fact, the vernacular has never left the ring, Zechen Xu said that "half of China's cities are vernacular". Externally, most of the marginalized characters live in the urban-rural area, which can be regarded as an extension of the countryside in the city. There is also a neighborly feeling that is unique to the countryside. For example, in *Ah, Beijing*, Hongqi Bian and his housemates help each other out, chatting before bedtime and often cooking and gathering together. Internally, the marginalized characters can never let go of their hometowns. Hongqi Bian has the triple expectation of longing for a Beijing hukou, being passionately in love with a girl from the capital, and being obsessed with the city of Beijing. But he still can't let go of his hometown and his hometown wife. Jiali Song, for example, can't let go of her parents, and Xiaorong Xia longs for a stable life in the countryside.

3.3. Casual and Humorous Language Style

Zechen Xu once said in an interview that "Shuo Wang's influence on me is more a kind of tone, a kind of freedom, he and Xiaobo Wang played a kind of liberating role for the novel, he loosened the bonds of the novel, and loosened the bonds of this genre [1]". In the shaping of marginalized people into the world, Zechen Xu's language is unique and breaks with the formal writing of the past, breaking the seriousness and solemnity to better present the world [1]. The novel is kind, witty, and colloquial as if chatting with the reader, dialect colloquialisms throughout the text, such as "anyway, it is the taxpayer's former money, spend it does not hurt"[6]. Subjective feelings and philosophies of life are inserted from time to time, for example, when writing about the dilemma faced by the phoenix man, it is written in the novel that "in the countryside among neighbors, grace is actually small, but love is big" and "all the contradictions will be resolved in the darkness"[6].

Black humor is to set up a series of "alien" images, that convey the author's expectations of life with their unimaginable words and deeds. Zechen Xu's novels often set up a series of "alien" images of marginalized people, so that readers can make a helpless laugh at the time of despair. In *Jerusalem*, Qian Tong, who wants to "go to the world", and Dong Lu, who has been locked up in a mental hospital, are fools in the eyes of others, but they are always capable of making shocking remarks and acting in a maverick manner. In *Jerusalem*, Qian Tong's desire to go to the world is only met with kind and understanding ridicule from the neighbors on Flower Street. 37-year-old Qian Tong has never left Flower Street since he was kicked by a pig when he was four years old, but he has ideals that do not fit his status. The contrasting effect of "overrated" creates a comedic effect. Dong Lu's cowardice puts him under double pressure from his mother and wife, but he is sent to the hospital by two strong women as if he is crazy. This incident is as ridiculous as when Dong Lu confides in Pingyang Chu, "They didn't call 120 to say I'm crazy, they called 110 to say I'm crazy [6]." Dong Lu becomes increasingly cowardly and resigned under the control of the shadow of female power, and the irony

of the inversion of male and female character traits is self-evident, not to mention the fact that Dong Lu is also an intellectual working in a university [7].

4. Reflections on the Value and Limitations of Marginalized People Going out into the World and Writing about it

The novels are an exploration of modernity with an eye to modernity. Idealistic characters are created to reflect the author's exploration of modernized characterization. In Zechen Xu's marginalized men, the most prominent male traits are frankness and openness, which conforms to the ancient Chinese Confucian culture's description of the ideal male gentleman, while they also have the characteristics of Western men, such as bravery and robustness, independent thinking, and openness and humor. Some of the women are gentle and feminine, dedicated and virtuous, in line with the portrayal of a fair lady in traditional culture, but with the strong self-consciousness of Western women, the portrayal of the "enigma women" group is a further manifestation of the typical Western modernized woman. In addition, the fact that economic woes are no longer an acute problem in Zechen Xu's novels also reflects the city's modernization and transformation; Focusing on a person's spiritual growth and redemption, not just material. It reflects the author's search for the meaning and form of life as a whole person. What is more, as an academy writer, he is able to lower his stance and write plainly about all identity characters, even those who do bad things. All these point to the author's exploration of modernity.

Novels focus on a novel angle and seize the opportunity of the times. At a time of rapid urbanization, post-70s writer Zechen Xu, who began his career in the 1970s, keenly observes the issues and opportunities in development. He is also concerned with people's universal longing for distant places. Few writers have managed to reflect on the world while writing about rural areas. Zechen Xu focuses on the fact that China's urbanization is still incomplete. Despite its surface-level prosperity, there are deeper, quieter aspects to it. This perspective challenges the traditional dichotomy between the countryside and the world. It introduces diverse elements into the stable cultural order and encourages a rethinking of the established cultural system. It also leads to a deeper examination of the complexities of large cities. This is a breakthrough in the dichotomy between the vernacular and the world, introducing heterogeneous elements into what people believe to be a stable cultural order, provoking questioning and re-conceptualization of the established cultural system, and an examination of the complexity of big cities. Therefore, it is a great attempt for the novel to focus on the undoubted theme of "marginal people going to the world", to express people's living condition and spiritual confusion and to expose social problems through the writing of "going to the world" in the process of urbanization. Through the fate of the marginal characters, it constructs the spatial structure of "hometown-city-world" and explores the social structure and modernization problems of modern China [8].

At the same time, the main theme implies the spiritual philosophy of "existentialism", which is skillfully structured. As Nietzsche once said, "The meaning of life is the search for the meaning of life". In Zechen Xu's novels, the final destination of many marginalized people who have wandered into foreign lands is still their hometowns, and after going round and round, they realize that life is not always elsewhere, and that their hometowns may be the world that they are "striving for". For some of the minor characters, knowing that it may not be right to leave their hometowns, they still go out without hesitation or even repeatedly, reflecting the author's affirmation that life is worth the trek, and embodying the writer's exploration of another kind of possibility. The meaning of life may lie in the experience of discovering more possibilities in the world, "the world" does not specifically refer to a geographical place, the true meaning of "the world" may only be realized by exploring it, and the treasures of each person's own life may be found only after reading the world. The treasures of each person's own life may need to be explored before they can be discovered. Even if someone fails, it is still more valuable than pursuing the so-called success at the same point, taking the first step bravely, and constantly transcending oneself, which may be the meaning of life.

However, there are some limitations in the novel. While the bravery of the marginalized people to go out and pioneer, their perseverance in their beliefs, and their exploration of their ideals are certainly praiseworthy and worthy of learning, they should not be over-exalted. Although art is higher than reality, and the meaning of literature is to provide readers with various possible options, some plots and characters in the book have ethical or moral problems, and the author uses gentle strokes to legitimize the bad behaviors by putting them in the garb of frankness, and resolves the hardships of life with human warmth, which leads to the excess of warmth and insufficiency of rationality [9]. For example, Chang'an Yi, Hongqi Bian and other groups engaged in running fake certificates are greatly tolerated and even recognized in the world of the book; and for example, Xiu Shu's behavior in *Jerusalem*, who is married but still unclear with Chou Pingyang, seems common and reasonable in the novel. The author sympathizes with the characters living in suffering from the bottom of his heart, but this kind of sympathy is prone to cause the problem of unclear ethical and moral pointing and ambiguous bottom line [8]. But illegal acts should not be all-inclusive to attract readers' sympathy and understanding, and acts against social order and morality should not be usualized.

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the theme of "marginal people going to the world" in Zechen Xu's novels, and analyzes the characteristics of his artistic expression in terms of his "idealistic" characterization and writing style, Zechen Xu's narrative mode of returning to his hometown, and his casual and humorous language style. Here and afar, reality and ideal, due to the mobility and informatization of modern society, the marginal characters also have some kind of real or illusory connection with the world, showing the author's care for the marginalized groups in the process of urbanization, and expressing the author's exploration of modernity through different groups of idealistic characters. It describes the complexity of big cities in the process of truly oriented urbanization, the world of mind and the spiritual journey of young people, and exposes the dilemmas of the modern era and seeks solutions with a level-headed perspective and a watchful attitude. The novels not only focus on both the traditional countryside and the world, portraying the departure and return of minor characters, but also break through the dichotomy between the city and the countryside, and between people and the world. They show the writer's exploration and thinking about modernity. In addition, they are inspirational to the youth nowadays to explore the world, know themselves, find the value of life, and complete self-redemption to meet the challenges of the times.

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