

The Construction of Oriental Women's Cultural Identity in an Intercultural Context —— The Example of the Novel “Siao Yu”

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Abstract: *As a masterpiece of Chinese writer Yan Geling's short stories, The Young Girl Little Fisherman focuses on the plight and the way out of the "other" status of oriental women in a cross-cultural context. This article takes Siao Yu, the main character of The Young Girl, as an example, and focuses on the construction of Oriental women's cultural identity from an intercultural perspective, exploring how Oriental women can gradually construct their own cultural identity and find a way out of the East-West cultural identity while maintaining their own characteristics and looking at themselves and others.*

Keywords: *intercultural context; oriental women; cultural identity; Siao Yu*

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of increasing cultural pluralism in contemporary times, the rise of ethnic and diasporic literature is increasingly becoming an important cultural phenomenon worldwide.^[1] The short story "A Young Girl's Fish" is a work of Chinese literature by Chinese writer Yan Geling, which focuses on immigrant life as a narrative theme. From the unique perspective of an oriental woman, the novel deals with the dilemma of identity construction faced by a young girl, Xiaoyu, in a cross-cultural context. As the 'other' in the American context, how can an Oriental woman find a way out of her East-meets-West cultural identity while holding on to her own cultural traditions and conceiving a new cultural identity. Through the portrayal of Siao Yu, a traditional oriental woman, the novel provides an answer: the way out lies not in a western way of struggle and advancement, but in an eastern way of spiritual sublimation.

2. Oriental Women in a Cross-Cultural Context

Born in Chinese mainland, Yan Geling was thirty years old when she moved to the United States, and her Chinese cultural roots had already been formed. It was during such a “sojourn” that Yan Geling created The Young Girl Little Fisherman. During this period, Yan Geling strives to highlight the essence of traditional Chinese culture in order to communicate with and even confront Western heterogeneous cultures, thereby constructing her own cultural identity.^[2] The local culture needs to be passed on and developed in a different culture, and the foreign culture needs to be understood and accepted by outsiders. Due to the writer's own complex identity and life experiences, Yan Geling's novels of this period also reflect multiplicity and complexity. Most of the women in Yan Geling's novels are marginal characters. These characters are representative and can profoundly express Yan Geling's thoughts on the image of tragic characters, and also reflect her thoughts on the fate of characters. Due to the writer's complex identity and life experiences, Yan Geling's novels of this period also reflect the multiplicity and complexity of her work. Yan Geling aims to create a character who can break down the barriers between East and West in The Young Girl Little Fish, and thus the image of Little Fish, an oriental woman who represents patience and tolerance, is born.

In The Second Sex, Beauvoir suggests that ‘women are not born, they are made’. The formation of women is not a natural process; it is a specific history and civilisation that defines the status and behaviour of women nowadays, and therefore women are shaped by their surroundings. Yan Geling's representative of Oriental women, Xiaoyu, has two “other” identities under the influence of her surroundings and others: one is the “other” in the American cultural context, and the other is the “other” who is dependent on Jiang Wei. The other is the “other” in the American cultural context and the “other”

who is dependent on Jiang Wei. Under the double oppression of the Western mainstream and the rights of the Eastern men, the Eastern women in the cross-cultural context are deeply marginalised and dislocated. The plight of the Oriental female "other" is also strongly presented in *The Young Fisherman*. In Xiaoyu, the stoic and tolerant qualities of the Oriental woman are shown, as well as her determination to constantly ex'mine'her cultural identity and change herself in the midst of such adversity, and to reshape her cultural identity.

3. The Construction of Eastern Women's Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is an abstract, multi-layered concept, and immigration and intercultural marriage in Chinese literature also make cultural identity in cross-cultural contexts increasingly complex. Cultural identity is both dynamic and diverse, so that in a particular cultural context, individuals can cultivate new cultural identities through interaction with people from different groups, constructing different cultural identities as the cultural environment continues to change.

Through observing Jiang Wei, Xiaoyu reflects on and breaks through her cultural identity under this dichotomy. The relationship between Xiaoyu and the old man in Italy is a mirror image of the Oriental woman and the Western man, which is mainly reflected in Xiaoyu's patience and tolerance towards the old man, as well as the process of the old man beginning to care for and accept Xiaoyu under the influence of her Oriental femininity.

3.1. Cultural identity in a "dichotomy"

Siao Yu and Jiang Wei belong to the "other" in a different cultural context. They represent the new generation of immigrants, who are precisely the most ordinary Chinese people, who choose to go to the United States in search of a better life and a broader opportunity, but are ravaged by the gap between the two cultures in another country and are in a serious cultural gap. In the middle of it all. The lack of permanent residency meant that he would always be a foreigner in the U.S. and could not really adapt to American society. The lack of permanent residency meant that he would always be a foreigner in the United States, unable to truly adapt to American society. After Xiaoyu came for him, the two of them still live in the cramped and humble slums, unable to have a decent life. Under the rejection and suppression of the West, the Chinese struggle to survive with their own traditions. Such a sense of powerlessness led them into a period of cultural shock, where they felt alienated and uncomfortable with the ever-changing and ever-changing American society. The survival and psychological balance of Siao Yu and Jiang Wei in the novel is a portrayal of the Chinese community in an East-meets-West cultural context.^[3] However, most Chinese are unable to change the fact of their marginalization even if they struggle and endure desperately, especially in the context of the time, the huge difference of Chinese and American language and culture makes it more difficult for them to integrate into the environment at that time, thus falling into a long period of frustration. The huge difference in culture makes it impossible to ignore, but in the face of the difference, it is even more necessary to adjust one's own mode of foreign cultural adaptation in order to find one's own place in the foreign cultural context and reconstruct a new cultural identity in the cross-cultural context. In *The Young Fisherman*, the different modes of cultural adaptation adopted by Siao Yu and Jiang Wei in the American cultural context lead to opposite results in the construction of their cultural identities in the cross-cultural context. But it is also due to this different mode of adaptation that Xiao Yu awakens and gradually breaks away from her dependence on Jiang Wei as the 'other'. But it is also because of this different mode of adaptation that Xiao Yu awakens and gradually breaks away from the "other" attribute of being dependent on Jiang Wei.

Canadian cross-cultural psychologist John Berry (1990) argues that the process of acculturation is a process by which individuals change their selves, and that the strategies by which individuals deal with cross-cultural adaptation are determined by two main factors: the individual's attitude towards maintaining his or her original cultural traditions and identity, and the individual's mode of seeking to establish new interpersonal relationships with the dominant culture of the new environment.^[4] Before leaving the country, Jiang Wei's mirror image of himself was stuck in the state of his ideal self, as if he was still the national champion in breaststroke ten years ago and a highly visible presence in the crowd. After entering the American cultural context, his ideal self gradually disappeared as he came into contact with social actors of a different culture, leaving himself to go with the flow of self-identification and ideal disillusionment. In fact, when he realises that the only way to gain an identity is to pawn off Xiaoyu, his ideal self collapses in an instant, filling his emotions and life with

grief and frustration, and tearing apart the close psychological distance between him and Xiaoyu, making him reluctant to admit his humble and shameful inner self. The male pride he should have felt in front of Xiaoyu is also gone, and he can only relieve himself of his powerlessness by paralysing himself. The most direct and easy way to reverse his vulnerability in a foreign cultural context is to obtain a "green card" by "pawning" his beloved, as if getting a "green card" as if receiving a 'green card' would prove that he had successfully transformed his identity. His final struggle and exasperation is a testament to the failure of his cultural adaptation process. This mode of cultural adaptation, which tends towards separation and marginalisation, does not help him to truly integrate into American culture, but rather places a greater burden on his psyche and gradually distorts him, making him a marginalised member of both Chinese and Western cultures. His final struggle and exasperation is a testament to the failure of his cultural adaptation process.

She uses her sincere and kind gestures to dispel the negative emotions of the old man and Rita due to her arrival, and at the same time, she makes the old man's stagnant life come alive with her arrival. He opens his eyes to the trials and tribulations of life with a positive attitude. While women are weak and men are strong in the Eastern cultural context, in the cross-cultural context of the novel, Xiaoyu's strong Eastern feminine consciousness displaces the strong and the weak. She uses her tranquil and calm attitude to face the plight of the temporarily disadvantaged in the intercultural context, and adopts a fusion approach to reveal the kind and beautiful qualities of the Eastern women to the old man and Rita in a subtle way, which also implies that under the influence of the beautiful qualities of the Eastern women, the Western culture represented by the old man begins to re-examine its own plurality, and eventually, through the joint efforts of the intercultural parties, the two cultures achieve This is also a sign that the Western culture, represented by the old man, is beginning to re-examine its own pluralism, and that eventually, through the joint efforts of both cultures, the two cultures will merge. At the end of the novel, Xiaoyu's thoughts gradually change, as her tolerance and forbearance towards Jiang Wei is not properly understood and respected, but she feels a deep sense of respect at the old man's deathbed. It is not difficult to speculate that after the ending, Xiaoyu will change her attitude towards Jiang Wei from one of obedience to one of disillusionment, leaving the "other" status of being dependent on Jiang Wei and slowly living for herself, opening up a world of her own in the context of Western culture. At the end of the novel, Xiaoyu's thoughts gradually change, because the tolerance and forbearance of Jiang Wei has not been properly understood and respected, but in the old man's deathbed, she feels deeply respected, and her female self-awareness awakens. It is not difficult to speculate that after the ending, Xiao Yu will change from being obedient to being discouraged, leaving the "other" status of being dependent on Jiang Wei and slowly living for herself, opening up a world of her own in the Western cultural context.

3.2. Cultural identity in an East-West context

The construction of Siao Yu's cultural identity in a cross-cultural context is concentrated in his interaction with the 'old man' in the text. The image of the old man in the novel is the opposite of the handsome, hale and hearty old man of the American 'Uncle Sam', who is poor, miserable and destitute. He is poor, miserable and destitute. is another image of being on the fringes of American society. His life is full of chaos and he does not have a formal name in the novel, so he is a 'nameless' person in a pluralistic American context. However, he helps to construct Siao Yu's cultural identity in a foreign culture, and is the facilitator of Siao Yu's transformation from the 'other' to the 'self'. The core of the cultural conflict between Siao Yu and the old man lies in the difference between the Chinese and American cultural models, and the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism proposed in Hofstede's theory of value dimensions. The Eastern cultural context, represented by China, emphasises collectivism, while the United States typifies the Western culture of individualism. Individualism is the belief that the individual is the single most important unit in any social environment, and emphasises the development of individual independence and self-identity.^[5] For example, the old man in the text is free to sell his identity as a tool to make money without caring about his girlfriend Rita's feelings, and Rita leaves without looking back after she has had enough disappointment, and Siao Yu's advice pales in comparison to this situation. Collectivism expects people in a group to take care of each other and therefore emphasizes the development of a sense of cooperation in which the self is integrated with the team.^[6] In the novel, Xiaoyu is willing to be a sacrificial lamb in the fake marriage drama in order to realize Jiang Wei's dream of staying in America, and even acts as a consoler and caregiver when Jiang Wei has an emotional breakdown. When confronted with the old man, she also always thinks of making peace, solving problems in a gentle manner, maintaining the face of both sides and hoping to maintain a state of harmony with others. In fact, it is this Oriental femininity in Xiaoyu that transcends the cultural barriers between East and West that enables the old man to quietly look at himself and communicate

with Xiaoyu in a polite and calm manner, so that the two people from different cultural backgrounds can reach mutual understanding and integration, and Xiaoyu's Oriental femininity is also constructed and reshaped in this process. At the end of the novel, Xiaoyu and the old man achieve a spiritual connection. The old man becomes a normal old man who has developed a proper relationship with the world and the world, and knows how to live well and behave seriously, while Xiaoyu also receives the old man's most sincere wishes at the end, achieving a spiritual transformation from being satisfied with the "other" to bravely pursuing the "self". At the end of the novel, Xiaoyu and the old man realize their spiritual connection. The old man becomes a normal old man, who has a proper relationship with the world and the earth, and knows how to live well and behave seriously, while Xiaoyu also gets the most sincere wishes from the old man at the end, and realizes the spiritual transformation from being satisfied with the "other" to bravely pursuing the "self", with their farcical encounter ending in a seemingly abrupt but far-reaching ending.

4. Women's identity in the context of cultural integration

As a Chinese-American writer with a strong sense of national and cultural identity, At the same time her identity is complex and multiple, she is not only a writer but also a transmitter of oriental culture. This femininity in oriental culture conveyed in her novel "Young Girl Little Fish" has been implicated in the identity and cultural construction of oriental people. Under the influence of dual cultural identities, the Yan Geling treats the differences and conflicts between Eastern and Western cultures with equanimity, seeking to strike a balance between Eastern traditions and the new Western world in a multicultural context. Yan Geling portrays her kind and beautiful heart in "Young Girl Little Fish", giving a voice to her as a representative female character who is vulnerable, lacks language skills and is willing to sacrifice herself. Under the wave of cultural integration and the strong attack of western culture, oriental women in a foreign cultural environment seem to be in the position of the "other", but even though they are vulnerable, they are still dignified, and they use their actions to forgive those who are considered mainstream and powerful. At the same time her identity is complex and multiple, as she is not only a writer but also a purveyor of oriental culture. This femininity in oriental culture conveyed in her novel The Young Girl Fisherman has been implicated in the identity and cultural construction of oriental people. Under the influence of a dual cultural identity, the In A Young Girl's Fish, Yan restores to the greatest extent her unique femininity and deep cultural heritage as an Eastern woman and her acceptance of Western culture, using cultural fusion to resolve cultural differences and conflicts, ultimately achieving a state of "beauty and harmony". This is also the way out for the "other" from a foreign cultural context to establish a "self" cultural identity in the context of cultural integration. This is also the way out for the "other" from a foreign cultural context to establish the "self" cultural identity in the context of cultural integration.

The intention of The Young Fisherman is to explore the ways of transcendence of the disadvantaged overseas Chinese in the face of oppression by the powerful Western civilisation, and the ways of communication to break down the racial and cultural barriers. The novel not only washes away the nastiness and humiliation of a disadvantaged cultural situation, but also bridges the gap between people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and in different situations. It is Xiaoyu's ability to conform and stay true to herself in all situations that prevents her from being overwhelmed by the onslaught of the powerful Western culture and allowing herself to be assimilated into her surroundings. This cultural identity helps her to assert herself in the face of Western culture and to maintain her own oriental femininity, which she has cultivated through her traditional oriental culture, and to use it to infect and influence the old man, bringing him the last beautiful emotion in his dying days. In the context of the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures, the only way for the oriental women, represented by Xiao Yu, to find themselves is to use sincerity, respect and understanding to break down the spiritual barriers brought about by the differences in foreign cultures, so that they can transform from the "other" to the "self" in such a cultural context, and make their cultural identity as oriental women truly identified. In the context of the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures, the only way for the oriental women represented by Xiaoyu to find themselves is to break the spiritual barriers brought about by the differences in foreign cultures with sincerity, respect and understanding, so that they can transform from the "other" to the "self" in such a cultural context, and make their cultural identity as oriental women truly identified.

5. Conclusion

In portraying the female character Xiaoyu, Yan Geling also incorporates her own confusion and loneliness during the construction of her cultural identity in an intercultural context, while at the same time resting the traditional oriental woman's patience and tolerance on the female figure of Xiaoyu, showing readers through Xiaoyu the tolerance and understanding of western culture by oriental civilization. In an intercultural context, Oriental women in a disadvantaged cultural position should construct their cultural identity while adhering to their own cultural values, rather than being willingly swept down by the tide of Western civilisation, separating their cultural roots and becoming a cultural marginal. Taking Siao Yu as an example, the exploration of the issue of constructing the cultural identity of Oriental women in an intercultural context provides a reference value for overseas Chinese to construct their own cultural identity in an intercultural context under the current globalisation, and also constructs a new cultural vision and values between the East and the West.

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