



# From Peach Blossom Land to Yellow Earth: The Transformation of the "Rural" Context of Chinese Literature from a Postcolonial Perspective

Jie Tao

School of Chinese Language and Literature, Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710119, China

Tao41911167@snnu.edu.cn

**Abstract.** From Shen Congwen's *Border Town* to Wang Zengqi's *The Love Story of a Young Monk* to Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* and *Frog*, the image of the Chinese "rural" gradually changed from the idealistic "Peach Blossom Land," the traditional Chinese spiritual home of harmony and idyll, to the "Yellow Earth," the feudal and backward barren countryside in the Chinese context. The latter tends to resemble the Chinese countryside in the Western imagination, and the connotation and function of the "rural" context has changed. In contrast, Chen Zhongshi's *White Deer Plain*, which also belongs to Chinese local literature, breaks the boundaries of the opposition between the two and constructs a hybrid intermediate state countryside, providing a feasible way to create contemporary local literature. Through a close reading, analysis and comparison of the above-mentioned historical works from a postcolonial perspective, this paper explores the transformation of the "rural" context in shaping the characters' love, kinship, social relations, and customs, reflecting the functional change of the "rural" context from showing human beauty to human evil, and the influence of Western centrism on reshaping the contemporary "rural" context. The local literature of the future can learn from the "Third Space" that embraces the culture of the rural areas and the modern civilization created by the *White Deer Plain* and write about the development of China's rural areas with the conflict and harmony between various characters, and the collision and interplay between the rural and urban areas.

**Keywords:** Peach Blossom Land; Yellow Earth; the Other; Third Space

## 1 Introduction

As one of the mother themes of literature, countless writers have completed the formation of the "rural" context with their strokes, and interpreting the rural in literature has become popular. As a representative writer of modern local literature, the study of Shen Congwen has gradually emerged and formed a boom since the 1980s, with lots of research works appearing, and his literary value and status have been confirmed, bridging the research gap in the early years<sup>[1]</sup>. The discussion on the lyric poetic features of

© The Author(s) 2023

E. Marino et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2023 5th International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2023)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 806,

[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-170-8\\_16](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-170-8_16)

Shen Congwen's *Border Town* is lively and full, with Liu Xiwei astutely pointing out that *Border Town* is an "idyllic masterpiece" [2], establishing a link between *Border Town* and the romantic pastoral; accordingly, the anti-modern character of *Border Town* has also been much discussed. The encroachment of modern civilization has added a heterogeneous element to the idyllic countryside so that the protagonist confronts the universalism of Western culture with her humanistic waiting [3].

With the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Mo Yan, the study of contemporary Chinese local literature has increasingly focused on this representative writer. His personalized narratives constitute the cultural facts of the Chinese rural world. The rural world and peasants, which do not exist in mainstream literature, are written in fiction and imagination. Many texts are read and analyzed to summarize the ideology of his rural world in various dimensions, such as ethical relationships and marital status [4]. Just as some works have become a treasure house of Western colonial thoughts and attitudes [5], the image of China portrayed by Mo Yan's deconstruction and reconstruction based on the rural context is full of controversies, which leads to the discussion of whether there is "Self-othering" or not [6], and also brings a new proposition - In the process of "going global" can there be a third way that transcends the antagonistic writing of national superiority and inferiority, resolves the contradiction between the selection and acceptance of the West and the translation intentions of the Chinese self, and achieves a harmonious dynamic equilibrium [7]? The volume of research on the Chinese rural context is enormous. Whether discussing the defection of the countryside from modernity in the works of Shen Congwen or reshaping the value of the contemporary country in the works of Mo Yan, the countryside is always in horizontal comparison with modern Western civilization.

Place the rural context on the vertical axis of Chinese local literature, from the modern era to the present, the "rural" context has gradually changed from the harmonious and peaceful "Peach Blossom Land" to the feudal and backward "Yellow Earth," and both its meaning and function have been changed and transformed. From a postcolonial perspective, contemporary literature's deconstruction of the rural context is influenced by a certain degree of Western centrism. Through a close reading of texts from modern to contemporary times, it is a rewarding field to analyze the changes in the rural context from a postcolonial perspective.

The rural context of "Peach Blossom Land," in which Chinese writers use the traditional national context of the countryside to create an ideal country that can confront the Western society represented by modernity, is best exemplified by Shen Congwen's *Border Town* and Wang Zengqi's *The Love Story of a Young Monk*. Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* and *Frog* are representative works of the rural context of "Yellow Earth" that emphasize the backwardness and isolation of the countryside, show the ignorance and barbarism of the country in its deviation from modernity, and turn the rural context into a foil that returns to or even serves the Western perspective of modernity. Both are written in the dimensions of love, kinship, and social relations of the characters and accordingly complete the formation of the rural context. The selection of these four works visualizes and compares the transformation that the rural context has experienced. As a constructed imaginary space, the narrative of the rural areas,

while conforming to reality to a certain extent, also gradually moves toward the Western imaginary of what should be, reflecting the color of Western-Centrism.

Chen Zhongshi's *White Deer Plain*, on the other hand, is outside the contexts shaped by these two, reflecting the clash and intermingling of Eastern and Western cultures, partially compromising with modern civilization while retaining deep national traditions and cultural roots, and pointing out a way for the future creation of local literature, that is, to build a "Third Space" in the middle state of mixing local culture and modern civilization, to master the discourse of the Chinese countryside itself, and to write about the natural Eastern countryside.

To gradually change the status of the other literature as literature "goes global," it is necessary to look at the present rural context and figure out how to create a local literature that is not only free from the perspective of Orientalism but also accepted by the West. The purpose of this paper is to read, analyze, and compare *Border Town*, *The Love Story of a Young Monk*, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* and *Frog*, to be alert to postcolonial ideas in literature, and to learn from the method of creating local literature in *White Deer Plain* that has the right to speak and goes global.

## 2 Evolution of Chinese Local Literature and the Influence of Western Thought

### 2.1 The Peach Blossom Land of Defection from Modernity: The Formation of the Early Rural Context in *Border Town* and *The Love Story of a Young Monk*

Shen's *Border Town* was based on a girl, Cuicui, who lived with her grandfather in the small town of Chadong and fell in love with the younger son of the boss of the riverfront, Nuosong. In the literary world, where reading Western classics and various Western literary theories was fashionable, his *Border Town* was apparently "extremely likely to arouse unpleasant feelings" [8]. Western ships and cannons opened China's doors, bringing modern civilization to the cities and spreading it to the countryside. However, at the same time, economic and ideological dislocation meant that the peasants of the lower and middle classes bore the brunt of the persecution, and the land on which they depended no longer provided a stable and permanent economic source. They could not adapt to the new society, and their worldview was deeply affected. The intrusion of modernity into the ancient countryside did not bring the expected glory of civilization but rather made the people of the land face greater difficulties - from the crisis of survival to the loss of spirit. Shen Congwen then builds such an isolated border town, a "Peach Blossom Land" in the closed mountainous region, where people can escape from modern society for a short time, leaving behind modernity and preserving the simplicity, innocence, and mountainous beauty of the traditional countryside - Chadong in western Hunan.

In this space, the modern industry seemed to hide its traces. The boats that crossed the river relied entirely on human power, without engines. The traditional model of harmony between humans and nature permeated the values, life and death, and love of

the people of western Hunan. The grateful money of the ferryman and the refusal of the boatman stood in stark contrast to the utilitarianism and commercial standards of modern civilization; the calm in the face of the flood and the determination of martyrdom for love confronted the rationality of modern civilization with the blandness of life and death. In western Hunan, everything should be natural, without the so-called rational considerations of modern civilization, and also rejected the weighing of consequences. Cuicui, as a figurative character of Shen's rebellion against modernity, her love for Nuosong was naturally born from the heart, from absolute sensuality, and without any legal rules of judgment. This primitive vitality was the resistance to rational thinking and utilitarianism. Cuicui's dedicated and persistent waiting, in the end, was the natural love of humanity raised to the highest solemnity and dignity of life beyond reason and utilitarianism<sup>[9]</sup>. Shen Congwen also blended the traditional folk customs of western Hunan, drinking sweet sake, singing folk songs, and other imagery unique to the Chinese countryside into a uniquely pure Chinese aesthetic that quietly confronted cold modern civilization with its strong human meaning. The simple and natural beauty of humanity shown in Cuicui was also the soul of the countryside that Shen Congwen called for to eliminate the poisoning of the nation by modernity and save the nation from danger.

Shen Congwen admitted that his work was inspired by the modernist poet Feiming<sup>[10]</sup>. As the progenitor of the Jing School (one of the most famous schools of modern Chinese literature in Beijing), Feiming continued the general theme of May Fourth romantic literature. Tracing back to the Romanticism of the May Fourth Movement, the Crescent Moon School and the Lakeside Poetry Society, the embodiments of romanticism in the world of poetry came into being. The latter has refined and matured the great wave of romantic literature since the May Fourth Movement<sup>[11]</sup>. By studying the works of the true poet Wordsworth<sup>[12]</sup>, the similarities between the Lakeside Poetry Society and the Lake Poets, a representative of 19th-century English Romantic poetry, in terms of socio-historical background, reasons for their emergence, writing about natural scenery, and simple and natural language, showed that there were many similarities between them<sup>[11]</sup>. On the other hand, the Lakeside Poetry Society was an important part of the development of new Chinese poetry, and Shen, who fought for the entry of New Poetry into literary history, had close ties with the Lakeside Poetry Society. The article published for the Lakeside Poetry Society, poet Wang Jingzhi's *Wind from the Orchid*, showed his positive attitude. Based on the similarities between the Lakeside Poetry Society and the Lake Poets, following the romantic literary trend of the May Fourth Movement, there is some basis for believing that Shen was influenced by the Lake Poets. Both used the countryside and the idyllic garden to create a vision of their nation and to reflect on modern society.

The Lake Poets lived in seclusion in the Lake District of northwestern England, far from the social struggles, and their poetry mainly depicted the natural atmosphere and rural life, thus denying the ugly urban civilization. The Lake Poets and Shen Congwen wrote about the countryside, both showing the innocence and purity different from urban civilization, preferring to emphasize the beauty and elegance of the countryside with clear and pure water, soft flowers and plants and contrasting the beauty of man with the beauty of the countryside, forming a pure and beautiful spiritual home. The

difference is that the poems of the Lake Poets often contained strange and mysterious stories and exotic landscapes, which contradicted Shen's concept of depicting local customs and highlighting the traditional folklore of the countryside. As the last piece of pure land resisting Western civilization and clinging to national traditions, the western Hunan border town tried its best to express its national values and characteristics, so it was more important to portray the unique ethnicity of the Chinese countryside, such as various songs to welcome the gods and various festivals and celebrations. Cuicui's emotional entanglements were also told in the context of the Dragon Boat Festival, where all the sorrows and joys began. Moreover, in the Dragon Boat Festival, the warm and lively traditional folk festivals and the peasant economy without modernity were essentially the same and combined, perfectly and harmoniously, uniting man and nature, nation and countryside.

For this purpose, Shen Congwen built a spiritual home in *Border Town*, dominated by the beauty of nature and humanity, to soothe the lower-class people persecuted by modernity and caught in a spiritual dilemma. Wang's local literature inherited Shen's spiritual guidance and similarly created a peaceful place for the soul to dwell in his works, as evidenced by his masterpiece, *The Love Story of a Young Monk*.

The pastoral mood of *The Love Story of a Young Monk* was in the same vein as that of Shen. The story was told through the innocent and hazy love between Minghai, a young monk, and Xiaoyingzi, a peasant girl, and it went further than *Border Town* by directly using the "nunnery" where the monks lived as a stronghold isolated from modern civilization, showing its seclusion more thoroughly than the small town of Chadong. The monks in the novel could fall in love and marry. The love between the monk Minghai and Xiaoyingzi could be approved by the villagers. Their dates often took place in the natural environment of the river and the fields, away from the trade-offs of modern utilitarianism. By depicting the love between Xiaoyingzi and Minghai, the affection between Xiao Yingzi and her mother, Minghai and her uncle and the monks, and the harmonious relationship between the monks and the public, Wang Zengqi created a tranquil world that was removed from the world and free from utilitarianism. The novel shows the instinct and nature of the characters to pursue love and also expresses the writer's desire to get rid of the indifference of modern society and recall the beauty of human nature of mutual love and affection. The simplicity and beauty of the characters in the text and the naturalness and harmony of the whole literary style further characterize the rural context as an idealistic Peach Blossom Land with strong romanticism.

## **2.2 The Yellow Earth of Unbalanced Order: The Formation of the Contemporary Rural Context in *Frog* and *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out***

Mo's local writing has brought about a dramatic change in the contemporary rural context, fundamentally altering the nature of the previous rural context, which was devoted to showing the beauty of humanity and isolating the ugliness and utilitarianism of modern civilization. Through the extreme writing of the savagery and cruelty of the characters in his stories, he constructed a closed and backward "Yellow Earth". The absence of modern civilization led to an imbalance of order, the countryside no longer looked

tranquil and beautiful, and the people living in the countryside lost their simple and innocent personalities. Human relationships changed from harmonious and trusting relationships based on the heart to chaotic relationships based on carnal desires and interests. *Frog* told the life story of Gugu, a village doctor who had worked in obstetrics and gynecology for many years as she implemented family planning policies in the countryside. *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* begins with the story of landlord Ximen Nao's reincarnation as a donkey, a cattle, a pig, a dog, a monkey and a big-headed baby in the family of peasant Lan Jiefang. In *Frog* and *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, Mo's choice of value, value judgment, and reconstruction of meaning for the rural context was evident.

Both books advanced their stories by drawing analogies between humans and animals, essentially writing about human nature and animal nature in one dimension. In *Frog*, Gugu's physical appearance is like that of a pregnant female frog, and her cold and numb heart is like the cold blood of a cold-blooded animal; In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, the main character, Ximen Nao, was reincarnated as an animal four times to describe the selfish and cruel human relationships in the countryside through the eyes of animals. This way of writing, which mixed animals and humans, implicitly diluted the progressiveness of human civilization. Animal nature and human nature were merged into one, and the various desires of the animals to satisfy their survival needs were transferred to the human beings so that the human beings in the rural area had the savagery, greed, and rudeness of the animals. There was no love between spouses, and they were completely dominated by carnal desires. Friends were not equal or respectful but with slavery. The completely chaotic kinship relationships, such as betrayal, incest, and blind procreation, showed the evil of human nature to the fullest.

In Mo's writing, the idealism and romanticism of the countryside no longer exist, and its sinful and dark side replaces the beautiful and virtuous undertones of the previous context. Modern society, on the other hand, is not characterized by complete civilization and nobility but a place of conversion for those who have shed their barbarism and backwardness after experiencing the baptism of the countryside - completing the experience of human evil in the countryside, learning to be so-called civilized after entering the city, and knowing how to reflect and disguise in the order. Mo Yan does not affirm the utilitarianism and hypocrisy of so-called modern civilization. Although his characters who enter the city are aware of the evils of the countryside, they only choose to wrap themselves in urban civilization to cover up their former mistakes and not make any changes. His countryside, however, completely and unabashedly exposes the desires of human nature, reveals the hidden dark side of the human heart, and embodies the evils committed by human beings with their most primitive instincts and sensibilities without the restraint of civilized order, which constitutes a negative and irrational Yellow Earth. As a writer of magic realism, the countryside he constructs is also not real but is formed by emphasizing the darkness of the countryside and increasing the degree of exaggeration of its sins to convey his idea of the countryside.

### 3 The Construction Process and Characteristics of Chinese Rural Contexts

From Peach Blossom Land to Yellow Earth, the contemporary rural context has been transformed by love, kinship, social relations, customs and traditions in many dimensions. The countryside is always in a position of the other that is spoken for and kept at a certain distance from reality. The Peach Blossom Land is completely idealized, deliberately ignoring the ills of the Chinese countryside, and extremely light on capitalist trade relations. However, the countryside cannot be completely free from the influence of time, so the Peach Blossom Land can only be an imaginary countryside. The Yellow Earth is also a word that has been presented, even in terms of Spivak's Subaltern Theory. It is a subaltern that has been absolutized and lost. Mo's writings deliberately draw the human relations between people into direct interests, expose the hidden evil of human nature and exaggerate it through artistic means, obscure the simple and natural side, show the primitive savagery and cruelty of human nature, and put all this on the uncivilized stage of the countryside that has not been educated by modern civilization, showing a kind of cultural hegemony in shaping the context of the countryside.

#### 3.1 Transformation in the Dimension of Love

From Shen to Mo, the most intuitive transformation of the rural context is the rewriting of love relationships. In Shen and Wang's writing, the union of the characters must be linked by love, a purely spiritual love without the exchange of interests. The process may have twists and turns, but the end must come down to waiting - waiting is the perseverance of love, and in waiting, the noblest uniqueness of love is brought to completion. In *Border Town*, faced with the rich dowry of the lady who had a mill and Cuicui who had nothing but a ferryboat, Nuosong did not hesitate to choose the latter: "Suppose I did not want this mill, but that ferryboat instead."<sup>[8]</sup> His choice to marry is entirely from the love of his heart. In *The Love Story of a Young Monk*, Xiaoyingzi, without considering Minghai's identity, background, or family background, bluntly expressed her love and boldly asked, "I will be your wife. Do you agree?"<sup>[13]</sup> It is also a pure emotion from the heart.

Mo's characters are often united by other factors: parental order, carnal desire, or the responsibility of procreation, which brings men and women into marriage with pain. Marriage and childbirth are not the results of love but a choice made under the dual pressure of physical instincts and the mission to carry on the family tradition. In *Frog*, the endless desire to have children was the theme of the book, and the desire to carry on the family lineage in the countryside was so fervent that it was common to pay for it with one's life, and it didn't matter whether there was love or not. Geng Xiulian, who was pregnant and in hiding, had to have an abortion for violating the family planning policies, and her husband's response was, "Three generations have had only one son each. Will I be forced to see that line end? Open your eyes, Heaven..."<sup>[14]</sup> His opposition to the family planning policies was not due to fear for the safety of his loved ones or the pursuit of independence of will but simply to perpetuate the corrupt tradition of

"three generations having only one son each. In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, the carnal writing of Ximen Nao was used to clarify the reason for the union. The reincarnation of the donkey, Ximen Nao, was confronted with a battle between human nature and animal nature in his heart then he submitted to his carnal desires, completely tearing off the veneer of humanity and showing his most primitive desires during the mating. It did not care about the spiritual mingling. After dawn, the female donkey resolutely left Ximen to survive, in stark contrast to Cuicui's waiting. In the novel, the mating of the animals with Ximen takes place in the wild, and the wild combination between heaven and earth emphasizes the chaos and capriciousness of the imbalance of order after the separation from civilization, all out of complete sensuality and denounces as barbaric by the civilized eye.

### 3.2 Transformation in the Dimension of Kinship

The different writing of kinship is also one of the prominent manifestations of the transformation of the rural context. Cuicui and Grandpa in *Border Town* had a gentle, equal, natural and loving relationship. Cuicui wanted Grandpa to accompany her no matter what she did, and Grandpa had full respect for Cuicui's choice of husband. They were understanding and supportive of each other and also made some funny jokes. Grandpa gave Cuicui a great deal of autonomy in her marriage, which reflected the respect for the individual will and the equal and harmonious relationship between grandpa and grandchild. In *The Love Story of a Young Monk*, Xiaoyingzi's mother acquiesced to Minghai and Xiaoyingzi's love with care and did not pressure them because of their status. The elders in the countryside guided the characters' growth as gentle guides, giving their children equality and respect based on love rather than authoritarianism.

The indifference in the relationship between father and son was often present in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*. Ximen Jinlong's attitude toward the family name was obvious, as the family name was no longer a blood bond between father and son but a weapon to be used against them. When he had to change his status class, he would change his family name to follow his stepfather's family name, and when his stepfather stopped being a helper, he would quickly change back to his family name. The family name was to him what his biological father and stepfather were to him, purely utilitarian and without regard to affection. Lan Jiefang joined the commune and also severed his relationship with his father. Although they are biological father and son, the stubborn and reticent father, Lan Lian, represents the control and domination of patriarchal power, and there was almost no communication with his son, and he was the only one who decided on the big and small things in the family. The capriciousness and recklessness of the son were also a subversion of patriarchal oppression. In oppression and counter-oppression, the father-son relationship was unbalanced and broken. In *Frog*, Gugu, who treated her relatives equally, also showed a cold and formulaic attitude to her nephew-in-law's life in danger, which eventually led to her death. This kind of family relationship, which extinguished human love, was very distorted and alienated. It deliberately formed the indifference and numbness of the countryside by depicting cold characters, covering up the warmth between relatives in reality, depriving the flesh-



and-blood characters in the countryside of their right to speak, and constructing the imaginary countryside.

### 3.3 Transformation in the Dimension of Social Relations

In *Border Town*, human relations in the small town of Chadong were characterized by harmony, mutual help and sincerity and were very inclusive. Whether it was the secular view of free love that "A ferryboat need not be worse than a grain mill."<sup>[8]</sup> or the town's recognition and praise of Shunshun, the boss of the riverfront, for his self-sacrifice and helpfulness, or the old soldier's promise to Cuicui, the orphan of his best friend, that "I will take care of everything."<sup>[8]</sup> They all reflected the simple and harmonious social style of this small town and the interpersonal relationship of love and affection. The same was true of the world's tolerance of monks getting married and having children, drinking and eating meat in *The Love Story of a Young Monk*. Being a monk was just a peaceful life choice; being a monk was just an ordinary job, and it was quite normal for monks to have emotions and desires. The natural and simple folk world was a representation of the author's ideal of natural and loving life. The characters were not bound by the rules and regulations; although they were all mortals, there was no malice or cunning. The simple and harmonious love between many characters formed a living space overflowing with the joy of life<sup>[15]</sup>.

In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, the chaotic ethical relations, the official rivalry and the calculations between brothers and sisters reflect the greedy and selfish society and the hypocritical human relations. In the novel, animals' contributions to humans often went unrewarded, as when the heroic donkey was eventually eaten and died and when the Pig witnessed the cruelty of human slaughter of wild boars but died, in any case, to save a drowning child. The moral evaluation system of human beings, in which "repaying evil with virtue" and "repaying kindness with revenge" were in stark contrast, highlighted the misalignment between animal and human nature, and constituted a barbaric and cruel human society. Mo Yan used "the other" perspective of animals to write about human and animal suffering caused by human cruelty, to deconstruct the perception of history in the decades after the founding of New China, and to show the side of human purgatory<sup>[16]</sup>. Gugu's total disregard for the life of the mother and the fetus in *Frog* was cloaked in seemingly just and reasonable rhetoric, but it also showed the deep-seated human hypocrisy and malice, as well as the deviation of the whole society. The state will be represented by Gugu was contrary to the real interests of the family. The plot of the family banquet to celebrate the nephew's becoming a pilot without inviting Gugu, and the awkwardness of the crowd after Gugu's appearance at the banquet, all showed that it was contradicted by the patriarchal level<sup>[17,18]</sup>. Even though she had worked as a doctor to save lives and help the injured, the direction and evaluation of her character ultimately could not escape the shackles of the male patriarchal society, and the feudal, patriarchal concept of the whole rural society was difficult to shake.

### 3.4 Transformation in the Dimension of Customs and Traditions

In *Border Town*, Shen Congwen gave a detailed and interesting description of such customs as boat racing, singing mountain songs, and catching ducks at the Dragon Boat Festival. The love between Cuicui and Nuosong also unfolded at the Dragon Boat Festival. The characters in the text were proud of "this land", and by sketching the beautiful scenery and customs, the author showed his deep feelings for the countryside and heritage of national culture and the gentle and generous nature of the people in Chadong in the beautiful mountain songs. The descriptions of activities such as working in the fields and picking water chestnuts in *The Love Story of a Young Monk* also had a lively tone, showing the unique fun and childishness of the countryside. Wang Zengqi often showed the characteristics of the countryside on the fringes of rural society, depicting the fading traditional occupations to display local customs <sup>[19]</sup>.

In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, the deception of the King of Hell and the disgusting secret method of using animal genitals to make wine to accompany dishes focused on the feudal ignorance of the countryside, describing the greed and hypocrisy of the characters who indulge in it from the perspective of the superiority of modern civilization. The rustic world's belief in supernatural powers also revealed a treacherous, shadowy world of customs. In *Frog*, man's desire for fertility was expressed in the worship of frogs, and the quest for children through belief in frogs also shaped the ignorance and anti-intellectualism of the countryside. The depiction of Gugu being attacked by a group of frogs after drinking is extremely horrifying. The frogs, which in modern society are reduced to food, retained such an aggressive power that they frightened a staunch materialist to the point of foaming at the mouth and fainting on the ground, making the frogs a supernatural force to counteract man. The view of mysterious folklore reflected the position of cultural criticism and enlightenment.

In the former context, wine often represented loyalty and passion, while in the latter, it was a source of misfortune and a demonic mirror that revealed the evil of human greed. In the former context, wine often served as a cheerful way to communicate with and inspire people, while in the latter context, it always brought about the proliferation of sexual desire and violence. The description of traditional customs in the latter context focused on feudal and superstitious activities, with few cultural activities showing the customs of the people, also deliberately emphasizing the ignorance of the countryside, contrasting it with the rationality and enlightenment of modern civilization, and demonizing the countryside.

## 4 Preserving the Culture of Chinese Local Literature with Distinct Characteristics

Whether it is Peach Blossom Land or Yellow Earth, the rural context is an image of the other that has been represented and lost its right of discourse. The former is beautiful, pure, mysterious and poetic, while the latter is barbaric, backward, closed and unenlightened; both are only imaginary and constructed countryside, far from the real one. The latter is especially popular in the contemporary rural context, where the irrational

and uncivilized nature of the yellow earth is used to contrast the rationality and superiority of modern civilization, catering to Western centrism and constructing the oriental Yellow Earth in the Western imagination<sup>[20]</sup>. This means that to counteract the unbalanced image of the Chinese countryside in the Western imagination and, at the same time, enable local literature to go abroad and exert its influence. It is necessary to strike a balance between preserving national characteristics and presenting modern civilization. In Chen's *White Deer Plain*, for example, the clash and fusion of the two eventually reach a balanced result in which traditional culture has its merits but must be replaced somewhere by modernity, with a search for national tradition and a compromise with modern civilization.

*White Deer Plain* builds a land that accommodates the symbiosis of rural culture and urban civilization, where the two have their strengths and weaknesses, clash and merge, and where the elevated position of overlooking is removed, leaving the development of the Chinese countryside under the equal gaze of both. According to Homi Bhabha's key coinages<sup>[21]</sup>, the theory of the Third Space and Cultural Hybrid, the plain is an intermediate state between national tradition and modern civilization, reaching a third space of cultural hybridization. In this space, Bai Jiaxuan's adherence to the traditional ancestral system is as praiseworthy as Lu Zhaopeng and Bai Ling's move to introduce the revolution of modernity. In the countryside, there are simple and loyal people like Lu San and Xian Cao, as well as the hypocritical and cunning Lu Zilin; there is Mr. Zhu, who inherits the soul of the nation and the Chinese cultural lineage, as well as Tian Xiao'e, who is oppressed by the patriarchal power and rises against it. Modern civilization has eaten away at the culture of the nation, but it has also been civilized and enlightened, such as running schools and teaching knowledge; the culture of the countryside has inherited and carried on the traditions of the Chinese nation, but it also has the deep-rooted feudal dregs under its patriarchal system. All the strengths and weaknesses of the rural reality, all the things to be celebrated and to be changed, are shown through the characters with different personalities. The final development is presented under their actions, harmonizing in the third space - a white deer is jumping into the future, into the distance, into the new world in the *White Deer Plain*, and there is also the traditional national backbone represented by Bai Jiaxuan, which can never be broken.

*White Deer Plain* offers a creative way: to build a Chinese rural context based on its Oriental perspective, to eliminate Orientalism, to show the reality of the countryside based on the discourse of the Chinese countryside itself, but also to see the influence and changes of Western modernity on the Chinese countryside, and to write the future path of the Chinese countryside with an equal view.

## 5 Conclusion

Through the textual analysis from Shen Congwen to Mo Yan, the rural context influenced by Western thought has undergone a remarkable transformation from an ideal world full of romanticism to the image of the East in today's Western imagination. The rural context has changed in the formation of multiple dimensions such as love, kinship, social relations and customs of the characters, thus transforming the contemporary rural

context from a Peach Blossom Land, which was once a spiritual home and an escape from modernity to a Yellow Earth with an imbalance of order under the absence of civilization and reduced to an image of the Other being represented.

Chen's *White Deer Plain* can show us how to free the construction of the contemporary rural context from this shackle, that is, by constructing a "third space" in the text that mixes rural culture and modern civilization, maintaining an impartial and objective view of itself, writing the development of the rural areas with the struggle and integration of various types of characters, and giving the rural context a right of discourse.

From modern times to the present, there are many excellent works of Chinese local literature, and there are many rural contexts corresponding to the "Peach Blossom Land" or "Yellow Earth". Although this paper selects some representative works for discussion based on the four dimensions of analysis and the influence of the works, it is still difficult to cover contemporary Chinese local literature comprehensively, and there are limitations in classifying the rural context. How the Chinese rural context is formed and transformed requires in-depth analysis and interpretation of more representative works and works by more contemporary writers in the future. In addition to the hybrid space formed by *White Deer Plain*, there are many other contemporary local literary works with similar methods and means, and there is still much room for discussion about where the future of Chinese local literature should go.

## References

1. Yuan, Y. (2017) The Study of Shen Congwen in China. In: Gang, Z., Sihe, C., Xinying, Z. (Eds.), Routledge Companion to Shen Congwen. Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, Shanghai. 27-38.
2. Liu, X. (2017) Border Town and "Portrait of Eight Streets". In: Gang, Z., Sihe, C., Xinying, Z. (Eds.), Routledge Companion to Shen Congwen. Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, Shanghai. 69-73.
3. Zhu, L. (2011) The Collision of Pastoralism and Modern Civilization: An Analysis of the Anti-Modernity Factors in the Theme of Border Town. *Journal of Luoyang Normal University*, 30(09): 42-44. <https://doi.org/10.16594/j.cnki.41-1302/g4.2011.09.009>
4. Ren, H. (2015) The Rural World in Mo Yan's Anthropological Writing (PhD dissertation), Lanzhou University, Lanzhou. [https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=QOR9nnE\\_NmL9V8h56F-UkJGqtuS97O8awZUZdCqWII4KUAWHQX0BRNhyHANjGQtXhkQEXfRM2U2tgxNQs0jtrPz\\_SwXm9yQQ1fB3NyXWuBaNuQ6OOK-Bcrl19f2rSMjVEDFbPz4nUHXI=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS](https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=QOR9nnE_NmL9V8h56F-UkJGqtuS97O8awZUZdCqWII4KUAWHQX0BRNhyHANjGQtXhkQEXfRM2U2tgxNQs0jtrPz_SwXm9yQQ1fB3NyXWuBaNuQ6OOK-Bcrl19f2rSMjVEDFbPz4nUHXI=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS)
5. DORAN, C. (2016) Popular Orientalism: Somerset Maugham in Mainland Southeast Asia. *Humanities*, 5(1): 13. DOI: 10.3390/h5010013.
6. Zhang, Y. (2017) The Revelation of Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory on the "Going Global" of Chinese Literature: the Example of Mo Yan's Works. *Home Drama*, 14: 248-250. [https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=QOR9nnE\\_NmJI-Oj3k\\_aIdEK2a1Q4tV0YP4LwTUdyOD\\_le\\_MNeam0UXt\\_JUPM5VGJLLsHsVz8f6l3uRTg2evu\\_p14x\\_ICVTLLrJe\\_RAck2YuHEjaGFil0j-\\_kDfCBsqJwI0eiqBbvIJCE=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS](https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=QOR9nnE_NmJI-Oj3k_aIdEK2a1Q4tV0YP4LwTUdyOD_le_MNeam0UXt_JUPM5VGJLLsHsVz8f6l3uRTg2evu_p14x_ICVTLLrJe_RAck2YuHEjaGFil0j-_kDfCBsqJwI0eiqBbvIJCE=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS)

7. Liu, G. (2013) The Self and the Other: Implications of Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory for the "Going Global" of Chinese Contemporary Literature. *Journal of Shenzhen University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 30(04): 132-136. <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?FileName=SZDS201304028&DbName=CJFQ2013>
8. Shen, C. (2009) *Border Town* (J. C. Kinkley, Trans.). Harper Perennial, New York.
9. Yao, S. (2020) The "Human Beauty" of Cuicui: From the Anti-Modernity of Border Town. *Language Teaching in Middle School*, 497(11): 45-49. <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?FileName=ZYJX202011013&DbName=CJFQ2020>
10. Song, S., Gui M. (2004) Border Town: Lyrical Poetry and Romantic Pastoral. *Journal of Hunan Economic Management College*, 02: 98-99. <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?FileName=HNJJ200402043&DbName=CJFQ2004>
11. Wang, M. (2008) A comparison of the Chinese Lakeside Poetry Society and the Lake Poets. *Modern Chinese (Literature Research)*, 340(11): 130-131. <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?FileName=YWCZ200811066&DbName=CJFN2008>
12. Mishra V. (2022) Homi Bhabha and 'Signs Taken for Wonders': a second reading. *Textual Practice*, 36(1): 135-157. DOI: 10.1080/0950236X.2020.1839952
13. Wang, Z. (2011) *The Love Story of a Young Monk*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing.
14. Mo, Y. (2015) *Frog* (G. Howard, Trans.). Penguin Books, London.
15. Chen, S., Liu, Z., Wang G. (1999) The Spiritual Sublimation of Ethnic Terrains--Rural, Municipal and Western Spirits in Literature. *Quarterly Journal of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences*, 04: 180-189. [https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/article/abstract?v=QOR9nnE\\_NmKX\\_QtgFDx-kqCFGFZkZs8bV95bheekrmV-kakYmciyfpY2a0O8W9uQYPh8S08HDZfLex7U\\_rTwnGjN2YVvkuAXVuM5D4SVaJO6zHxvVdNNX7Q9fj0UxBNDsJ&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS](https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/article/abstract?v=QOR9nnE_NmKX_QtgFDx-kqCFGFZkZs8bV95bheekrmV-kakYmciyfpY2a0O8W9uQYPh8S08HDZfLex7U_rTwnGjN2YVvkuAXVuM5D4SVaJO6zHxvVdNNX7Q9fj0UxBNDsJ&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS)
16. Chen, J., Xiong, Y. (2019) Humanity, Animalism and the Imagination of Rural China: Animal Narratives in Mo Yan's Novels. *Journal of South China Normal University (Social Science)*, 239(03): 176-183. <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/44.1139.C.20190524.1723.044.html>
17. Zhang, J. (2021) The Tragedy of the Other: An Analysis of the Image of "Gugu" in Mo Yan's Novel *Frog*. *Journal of Dongguan University of Technology*, 28(06): 17-23. <https://doi.org/10.16002/j.cnki.10090312.2021.06.003>
18. Mo, Y. *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* (G. Howard, Trans.). Arcade Publishing, New York.
19. Zhao, S., Zhai, Y. (2003) Flowing landscape: A reading of Wang Zengqi's novel. *Journal of Anhui Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 31(05): 590-594. <https://doi.org/10.14182/j.cnki.j.anu.2003.05.014>
20. Li, Y. (2013) The Imbalance between Western Imagination and Eastern Imagination: An Ethical Issue in the Writing of "New Immigrant Writers" on Rural China. *Creation and Criticism*, 159(04): 4-9. [https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/article/abstract?v=QOR9nnE\\_NmIYMOxO-5YLxKvP\\_3sxM\\_bcsZORiMuIWRIEY\\_1XJzRAG0oz\\_B2tPLU\\_TnMTty3kqis5nsxh0wr-56zZaDFmJ0U1QySH\\_SAZgCjTJo65\\_Q1guB38wpiL9zkpnM9ALjPuAA=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS](https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/article/abstract?v=QOR9nnE_NmIYMOxO-5YLxKvP_3sxM_bcsZORiMuIWRIEY_1XJzRAG0oz_B2tPLU_TnMTty3kqis5nsxh0wr-56zZaDFmJ0U1QySH_SAZgCjTJo65_Q1guB38wpiL9zkpnM9ALjPuAA=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS)
21. John M. (2022) Wordsworth's Death and the Figure of the Poet in 1850. *Victoriographies*, 12(1): 98-114. DOI: 10.3366/VIC.2022.0449

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

