



A Discussion on the New Changes of Chi Zijian's Ecological Feminism Views on Women from Her Latest Novel *Yan Huo Man Juan*

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Abstract. The paper mainly talks about Yan Huo Man Juan, the new book written by Chi Zijian, to discuss the new changes of Chi Zijian's ecological feminism reflected from her works. It is found that with respect to space, the ecological landscape in the works of Chi Zijian tends to change from original to urban; besides, her work Yan Huo Man Juan is actually a big turning point of the change of author's ecological feminism. With respect to gender consciousness, gender consciousness tends to be highlighted in the ecological writing of Chi Zijian. With respect to the relations between ecology and individuals, Chi Zijian changes the original undifferentiated contact model between individuals and ecology, and establishes the distinguished contacts of different individuals with ecology. On the whole, the ecological books written by Chi Zijian have three changing steps, from primitive to rural and then to urban. What's more important is that the identity of women is discovered during the change.

Keywords: Chi Zijian; ecological feminism; Yan Huo Man Juan

1 Introduction

Yan Huo Man Juan, the newly published full-length novel in 2020 written by Chi Zijian can be dubbed as the turning point of her writing. Her previous works

including *The Last Quarter of the Moon* and *River of Forever Flowing* always highlight the author's distinctive ecological ethics consciousness with pre-modern factors by means of primitive ecological landscape and tribal native life. Compared to her previous works, *Yan Huo Man Juan* sets the story in Harbin, a modern metropolis; what's more, the characters are no longer limited to the herdsmen and farmers. On this basis, *Yan Huo Man Juan* shows obvious perspective changes of Chi Zijian by focusing on the urban space of Harbin, which demonstrates new dimensions of her ecological writing.

At present, in the view of ecofeminist theory, the achievements of relevant studies concerning Chi Zijian mainly focus on the thinking about Chi Zijian's handling of ecological landscape as well as her exploration of the relations between ecology and individuals. In the aspect of ecology, many studies have reached a certain height. Lots of theorists have pointed out that the works of Chi Zijian shows her attachment to the ecological landscape carried by the countryside and her commendation of the harmoniously integrated symbiosis between individuals and by ecology which has broken the binary opposition[1]. Additionally, the relevant papers are mainly concentrated on the studies of *The Last Quarter of the Moon* written by Chi Zijian and there are few studies on the other works of Chi Zijian. In the aspect of women, most studies tend to focus on the halo of motherhood and tolerance, characteristics analysis as well as image-building etc., of women[2]; and rarely regard women as a certain metaphorical symbol with some key significance in the ecological links, thus difficult to form systematic ecological outlook on women. What's more, there is no study regarding the flowing changes of the author's ecological views on women. In addition, currently, although there are the relevant studies on Chi Zijian's urban writing, they are basically on the level of textual analysis. Besides, most studies conclude that urban is contrary to rural, and the Chi Zijian's description of the urban area is to demonstrate her complex of "going back to her hometown" and her commendation of the intimate relations between rural area and ecology[3]. Nevertheless, as far as the author is concerned, the descriptions made by Chi Zijian of the ecological space concerning the urban area and rural area is not binary, absolutist, or static that the previous theorists assert. Instead, the author of the paper holds the view that in the aspect of ecological space building, the rural area and urban area written by Chi Zijian is integrated into a whole body, besides, the female perspective held by Chi Zijian bears great significance on her building of ecological space. Then, how did *Yan Huo Man Juan*, the newly published full-length novel written by Chi

Zijian reflect her changes from being primitive to rural and then to urban? What kind of role did the women figures play in Chi Zijian's ecological writing? What new changes of Chi Zijian's ecological views on women are reflected in the work? All these above are the main points to be discussed in the paper.

2 Spatial Transference of Ecological Writing: From Primitive Countryside to The Urban Landscape

In the spatial angle, the ecological landscape in the works of Chi Zijian changes from the primitive ecology to the urban ecology, and *Yan Huo Man Juan* is actually the turning point for the change of Chi Zijian's ecological views on women. In her previous works, the description of ecological landscape is mainly concentrated on the primitive ecology and avoids the description of urban area, that is, just depicting the ecological features and relations between individuals and ecology under the background of primitive ecology, which can be deemed as the first phase of Chi Zijian's writing. For example, in *The Last Quarter of the Moon* and *River of Forever Flowing*, Chi Zijian lays great emphasis on the depiction of primitive tribes and most ecological landscape carries the elements of primitive ecology. In my opinion, the first changing point in the writing of Chi Zijian is her work *Snow and Raven*, where Chi Zijian further expands her scope of perception, and the ecological landscape depicted in the work changes from primitive ecological space to the rural ecological space; besides, there is further development in the interaction between individuals and ecology. The transitional phase can be taken as the second phase of Chi Zijian's writing, i.e. the description of rural ecological space.

The rural area mentioned here boasts two features: firstly, in terms of urbanization level, rural ecological space is the space between primitive ecology and urban ecology; hence, even though there is some progress in the contact ways between individuals and ecology compared to that in the primitive ecology, it cannot match the modern urban ecological space. In her work *Snow and Raven*, she chose Fujiadian, Harbin in the 1920s as the background of the story, when some modernized equipment had been installed in Fujiadian, but Fujiadian is still secluded and kind of backward compared to the cosmopolitans like Shanghai. Objectively speaking, Fujiadian was not a primitive tribe or a traditional village. It was featured a typical rural ecological space between the primitive ecological landscape and urban ecological landscape. Secondly, in the dimension of time, taking the degree of

urbanization into consideration, rural ecological space is basically constructed in the past time background. To a certain degree, there is still a certain space with the realistic context. It can be seen that although in a certain degree, rural ecological space gets rid of the limitations of primitive ecological space which avoids urban development, but the story is still narrated in the past tense, and the construction of past tense context denotes that there are some artistic interpretations of certain plots, in other terms, there is the coexistence of the past and the fiction in the text, and the difference of the text background, outlook on the world with the modern realist world, which if is further defined as “reality”, it can say the author of the book controls the space between her creation and the reality by means of the time, thus weakening the objective contacts of individuals with ecology. In *Snow and Raven*, she transfers the narrative context from the primitive ecological space to Fujiadian, where there is a certain development in urbanization. However, in terms of time, the background of *Snow and Raven* is China in the 1920s. Although the context is based on a real event, the plague, it still fails to get rid of a certain fictional elements in the plot and characters as a literary work. In addition, resulted from the background of the work (China in the 1920s), the outlooks on the world and life as well as living habits presented in the work are distinguished from those in the modern world, thus further expanding the differences in narrative context and realistic context. It can be observed that in time and space, even though rural ecological space gets rid of the traditional primitive ecological narration, there are still some differences with the urban ecological narration and it's a transitional phase in between.

In *Yan Huo Man Juan*, Yuying Courtyard, Harbin is chosen as the ecological space. Yuying Courtyard represents the aggregation of contradiction between primitive ecological civilization and urban civilization by showing in the form of ancient architecture in the urban area. The state of coexistence with tradition and modernity seems to be contradictory but gradually endows Yuying Courtyard with polyphonic features, which is called the Polyphonic features of the environment. What's more, the residents in Yuying Courtyard come from all walks of life, who not only interact with ecology to display the development of ecological landscape but also integrate into the life of the metropolis by making a certain kind of living. This state of contradiction that individuals actively contact the ecological landscape and also go far away from the ecological landscape gradually in the urban life can be called the Polyphonic features of characters. The polyphony of characters and environment complicates the relations between the individuals and ecology in *Yan Huo Man Juan*,

thus making the plot more realistic. Huang E is one of the residents in Yuying Courtyard, who makes a living in the urban area but also maintains the relationship with ecology. Even when she steps out of Yuying Courtyard and serves on the working post, she also keeps contact with ecology intentionally or unintentionally. In Yuying Courtyard, when seeing Old Man Guo hung clothes out on an iron wire tied to a tree, Huang E twisted the iron wire off by using a pliers, saying "the tree is innocent and why did you tie it"[4]. She endows the old tree with humanity, to build the distinctive contact between herself and ecology. It can be seen that although Huang E makes a living with other residents in the metropolitan city of Harbin, she still maintains contact with the things with ecological metaphor in Yuying Courtyard.

Further speaking, the polyphony of characters is not separated with the polyphony of the environment. On the basis of coexistence, it generates superimposed effect; while the sparrow hawk in the book serves as the point of junction of the superimposition and the typical representative of ecology in Yuying Courtyard. After being saved by Liu Jianguo and others, the sparrow hawk settles down in Yuying Courtyard. Compared to the plants, the sparrow hawk is the only animal directly interacting with the residents. Compared with the animals like feral cat, the sparrow hawk is typical and irreplaceable in the terms of length of residence and frequency of interaction. Therefore, the sparrow hawk coming from the nature but living in human society has short physical and psychological distance with the human beings and is the typical symbol of the relations between ecology and the human beings. Moreover, as for Huang E, she considers the sparrow hawk as the messenger of Lu Mutou as well as her spiritual ballast; so she takes good care of the sparrow hawk like her baby. Correspondingly, the psychological state of Huang E can also be reflected on the body of the sparrow hawk, who has empathy for Huang E, by disturbing the Old Man Guo when it saw Huang E quarreling with him, taking the initiative to feed the feral cat raised by Huang E, and dead on the synthetic-rubber track before Huang E tried to commit suicide. It can be seen that there is not only the direct interaction between Huang E and the sparrow hawk in physical life, but also the strong empathy between them on spiritual level. In specific context, they are in complete harmony, which can be taken as another kind of coexistence in different dimensions under different living conditions. The sparrow hawk symbolizes ecology; while Huang E is the typical epitome of female image. The relations between the two represents the more delicate perception of women and ecology under more direct interaction. In that case, as a main female character in the book, what belief does Huang E adhere to and what kind

of ecological views on women held by the author of the book hidden behind the belief of Huang E?

3 Emergence of Gender Consciousness in Ecological Narration: a Woman Regarded as an “intruder”

In the angle of gender consciousness, gender consciousness is gradually highlighted in the ecological writing of Chi Zijian, and the book *Yan Huo Man Juan* is taken as one of the symbols of the transition. Previously, there is no obvious differences between female images and male images in the creation of Chi Zijian, who bear basically the same features and positioning. In *River of Forever Flowing*, the heroine's way of making a living and pursuit for life are fundamentally homogeneous with the male characters surrounded by; hence, the identity and standpoint of women are correspondingly weakened. In the same way, in the book *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, a certain number of tribal women basically do not show obvious feminine characteristics; and it can also be reasonable even if these women are translocated with the male characters. However, in the book *Yan Huo Man Juan*, Chi Zijian no longer avoids the essential difference between men and women, and gradually lays emphasis on gender consciousness. Since then, the female images begin to display typical female characters and the identity of the heroine has also changed from the indigenous to an "intruder".

The discovery of gender consciousness is based on the changes of ecological space. In the works created before *Yan Huo Man Juan*, Chi Zijian attaches great importance to the depiction of primitive ecological landscape or rural ecological landscape. Under the background, between human and ecology, the role played by human was weakened and their activities tended to be single and simple; hence, character homogeneity phenomenon is common. However, in the book *Yan Huo Man Juan*, the urban ecological landscape starts to become the emphasis of the author's ecological writing. Since urban areas possess many human landscapes, the life of people tend to be diversified. In the meanwhile, the urban population is composed of people who came from different places, so there is the space for the existence of “an intruder”. Based on this, the space for Chi Zijian to create characters is expanded, and correspondingly, the discovery of female gender consciousness is then unfolded.

Huang E is a main female character in *Yan Huo Man Juan*, and has distinctive characteristics of female gender consciousness: firstly, Huang E is the typical

"intruder". Meanwhile, she can be defined as the "intruder" carrying the female gender consciousness. The "intruder" mentioned here only refers to the outsider carrying new ideas or manners of behavior. Their perception and manners of behavior often clash with the specific patterns of time, space or human relations in the inherent environment, which would inevitably result in the mutation and even alienation of the existence state of things. Huang E is not a native Harbin-dweller, instead, she is a woman carrying her son to Harbin to find her husband, which fits a feature of an "intruder" that is an "outsider".

Secondly, the thinking and perception held by Huang E are distinguished from those native dwellers like Liu Jianguo and Liu Jiaohua. In the early days of settling down in Yuying Courtyard, Huang E got into trouble with her neighbors, for example she dismantles the iron wire tied to the tree for the worry that the tree might be hurt. Although finally Huang E made a certain compromise, the living habits of other residents in Yuying Yuan changed under the influence of Huang E: the Old Man Guo no longer hanged his clothes out on the tree, and the animals like sparrow hawk and feral cat are accepted there, which fits the second feature of an "intruder": boasting different manners of behavior and generates influence on the original living pattern.

Supported by the identity model of being an "intruder", Huang E unsurprisingly became the central point of interpersonal relationship and then turned to be an important embodiment of ecofeminism: Huang E had the attachment to the ecological nature and the experience of directly contacting with ecology. Additionally, influenced by the identity of an "intruder", Huang E broke the vicious living pattern of original urban dwellers, who were isolated from ecology; and provided the original urban dwellers with the opportunity to interact with ecology. Meantime, Huang E, as the central point of interpersonal relationship, boasted more direct and complex interaction with ecological landscape compared to others, which demonstrates ecofeminists.

On the basis of demonstrating ecofeminism, Huang E became a typical representative of female consciousness. Firstly, she has two double identities in her family: a wife and a mother. The direct purpose for her to "relocate in" Harbin is driven by her family identity (wanting to be a suttee after entrusting her son). When Huang E "relocated in" Harbin with this identity, the female gender consciousness was unfolded. Secondly, when living in Harbin, Huang E ushered in many complicated and changeable social identities by being an "intruder": Liu Jianguo's car follower, a cook at a construction site, and Weng Zi'an's lover, and so on and so forth.

Due to her social identity, Huang E became an important connection point of many main characters, by offering conditions for many character relationships. In the meanwhile, Huang E also served as one of the main driving forces that complicated the relationship among the characters and intensified the contradictions. It can be found that this kind of effect is related to the discovery of Huang E's female gender consciousness. In other words, without Huang E's typical female identity, there wouldn't be some character relations and contradictions. For example, Huang E was Liu Jianguo's car follower, and also Weng Zi'an's lover, which accelerated Weng Zi'an's integration into the Yuying Courtyard and the life of the Liu family, thus promoting the revelation of Weng Zi'an's identity. Huang E intended to let her son become the stepson of Liu Jianguo, which urged Liu Jianguo to face the harm to Wu Ming in the early years, thus revealing the character's inner contradictions. If the connection is made by a male character, it cannot be so successful, because in that case, some feminine emotional expressions, such as maternal love, would be blunt and abrupt.

Starting from the interaction between Huang E and the male characters like Liu Jianguo, it can be seen that on the basis of Huang E's "intruder" identity, she has also built a new character identity by her special contacts with ecology. Before Huang E came to Yuying Courtyard, Liu Jianguo had been troubled by his harm to Wu Ming, Yu Dawei distressed by the loss of his son and his dysfunctional relationship with his wife, and Weng Zi'an afflicted with his experience and lost for his future. It is easy to grasp that on the level of will and thinking, the main male characters in the book had all been in a barren, self-trapped state of mind; while the appearance of Huang E waked up their male consciousness and helped them to get out of miseries. At that time, Huang E was like a "rescuer" - that is to examine human nature in the modern world where the deity is lost, to reflect on the modern urban life, and to guide the urban residents to overcome the inner nothingness. The identity of "rescuer" is the specification and deepening on the basis of the "intruder" identity. Does the concept of rescue also reflect the new change of ecological view on women behind the change of Chi Zijian's ecological writing? Besides, what's the significance of female identity on the change of Chi Zijian's ecological writing? And how to present the specific issues in Chi Zijian's ecological writing? As for the questions above, the answers might be found from the changing relationship between ecology and women.

4 Female Identity and Construction of Chi Zijian's Ecological Writing System

In terms of ecology and the individuals, Chi Zijian changed the undifferentiated contact mode between the individuals and ecology in her previous writings; and instead she established different connections between different individuals and ecology. By analyzing all the books written by Chi Zijian, it can be found that, in terms of constructing the relationship between ecology and the individuals, women have more direct contact with nature compared to men, which shows a distinct color of ecofeminists in her narration.

In the angle of theories, ecofeminism is expanded by the relations between ecology and women. The researchers of ecofeminism in the early days opposed the opinion of binary opposition between man and woman, asserted breaking gender restrictions and still adhered to the opinion that "women was closer to nature compared to men"[5]. Afterward, some researchers held the view that the "maternity" of humanity can be connected to the "Mother Nature"[6], and then emphasize the conclusion that women were closer to ecology on the basis. However, relevant conclusions compared the distance between men and ecology with that between women and ecology, which essentially categorized men and women into two kinds of elements that have no intersection, thus making them back to the two camps of binary opposition. Currently, the authoritative ecofeminism studies basically agree with that there is no significant difference between women and men in the distance with ecology, and ecofeminism is not just limited to female subjects and their relationship with ecology; instead, it is gradually deepened on this basis to study the homology of female-related issues and ecological issues[7]. As for research trends, after evading the theoretical problem of binary opposition between men and women, ecofeminists are inclined to another direction, i.e. to believe that men and women have exactly the same contact with nature and ignore the differences in specific situations and among the features of characters. Therefore, some studies face the problems including rigidity of theories and analyzing the problems which are separated from the text and reality. What's more, some studies hold the view that for ecofeminism, the role played by the "female" element would gradually decline, and the theory might be evolved in a simple "ecological protection" direction step by step.

The literary works written by Chi Zijian expressed the distinctive understanding towards women and ecology. In *Yan Huo Man Juan*, there are differences between the

female characters represented by Huang E and the male characters represented by Liu Jianguo when contacting with ecology. In turn, the differences makes women more direct to contact with ecology. To analyze it in the angle of identity, the identity of Huang E transforms from “intruder” to “rescuer”. The life experience of Huang E is the vital element to urge her to feel the nature and make direct contact with ecology. Initially, Huang E was the landlady of Lu Mutou’s Store and responsible to send the travelers back home by sailing the yacht, during which Huang E had direct and intimate contact with the ecological landscape. She never got lost[4] and liked to walk along the river to talk with the swimming fish and the flying birds, the process of which was considered beautiful by her. It can be found that ecological landscape is taken as a good friend by Huang E, who treated it on the equal status. Instead of looking at the ecological environment from the perspective of examination, Huang E has a more direct contact with the ecological landscape, thus harvesting more delicate and profound experience in nature. Huang E develops an existential relationship with nature, and has mutual understanding and acceptance with it. In contrast, most male characters examined the nature and the relationship of human beings with nature in the perspective of absolute subjects, thus extending the distance with ecology. After Lu Mutou died, Huang E took her son to Harbin. As for her purpose, the direct appeal of Huang E is to find a adopting family for her son and then go back to the hawk valley to go back to the ecosystem. It can see that Huang E has a great attachment to nature and take nature as her relatives. This connection leads to the convergence of status and narrows her distance with nature. After going to Harbin, Huang E has changed from the single ecological contact to an “intruder”. Influenced by the identity of “intruder”, Huang E broke the isolated living pattern of the original urban dwellers, who were alienated from ecology, and provided them with the opportunities to contact ecology. In the meanwhile, on the basis of the features brought by the identity of “intruder”, Huang E played the role of an “rescuer” during the communication with the male characters like Liu Jianguo by rescuing Liu Jianguo and Weng Zi’an etc., from the original void living state, to help them feel the beauty of ecological landscape, accept the regrets in the past, make up for the mistakes, and their own positioning and peace of mind in the urban life of hustle and bustle.

What’s more, Huang E’s identity as an “intruder” and “rescuer” also endows her a specific way to connect with ecology. This is mainly demonstrated in her way of making a living and her lifestyle, which is directly connected with ecology. Above all, if Huang E is taken as the central point of interpersonal relationship, while building

interpersonal relationship platform, Huang E had more direct and complex contact with ecological landscape compared with others and displayed the color of ecofeminism. Based on this, Huang E had more direct contact and connection with ecology. Additionally, the uncertainties and complexities brought by the identity of “intruder” also led to Huang E’s way of making a living, which is distinguished from the others and let Huang E notice the natural and ecological details which are hard to be discovered by common people. After arriving in Harbin, Huang E had served as the servicewoman in beer festival and dried fruit seller etc., and her freely changing of jobs rendered her more perspectives to contact ecology and more deep and delicate opportunities to contact nature. During the process, her relationship with the nature is gradually closer. Compared to the male characters like Liu Jianguo, Huang E had more direct contact with ecology and even reached the degree of cofrequency resonance at some moment. Moreover, the uncertainties of the “intruder” identity results in the low level of life and income. As it said the economic base determines the superstructure, so the social status of Huang E is not prominent. Similarly, in the eyes of many characters in the book, ecology also has a low status.

On the level of living environment, the interaction of Huang E with ecology in Yuying Courtyard also expressed more direct contact of women with ecology. After arriving in Harbin as an “intruder”, Huang E influenced the ecological landscape, which is directly expressed in Yuying Courtyard, where the ecofeminism behind the behaviors of Huang E is further expanded: ecofeminism is not just limited to the macro-perspective of ecological issues and female issues; instead, any specific element in ecology can be taken as the scope of eco-feminism when connecting to the female element. Coupled with the features of the “intruder”, Huang E becomes the symbol of ecological and female connection in Yuying Courtyard. On the premise of it, women have more direct contact with ecology compared to men.

On the whole, the three phases of Chi Zijian’s ecological writing presents the ecofeminism in different social development phases. In the primitive ecological writing context, women are the symbol of non-secular ecology. In *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, the main female figure is a priest and chief of the tribe. The identity is non-secular, and connected and applied to ecology through the carrier of a woman. While in the phase of rural ecological writing, the connection between women and ecology is more inclined to express the history. In *Snow and Raven*, the women like Zhai Guifang represented the fates of women in the early 20th century, when the society of China suffered from both domestic and foreign troubles. With further

development of ecofeminism of Chi Zijian, in urban ecological writing, ecology tends to be a carrier of examination; besides, the connection between ecology and women is the examination of humanity. Further speaking, the ultimate goal of the examination is still the role of “rescuer” played by women - to rescue the nothingness of mind and wake up the humanity by ecological outlook of the delicate and equal dialogue.

5 Conclusions

The supplement of urban space in Yan Huo Man Juan, makes up the emptiness of ecological space in the writing of Chi Zijian, whose writing can be divided into three phases from primitive to rural and then to urban areas. More importantly, during the change, the identity of women is “discovered”. In the ecological writing system of Chi Zijian, gender consciousness and female themes gradually emerge, which offered effective solutions for some issues in the ecological outlook of Chi Zijian. It can say, the revolutionary redemptive power of ecofeminism is the main topic of analyses in the later writing of Chi Zijian. Moreover, against the backdrop of post-secular feminism, the change of eco-feminism in literary works can be deemed as the further direction of research.

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