

A Study of Animal Narratives in *Chaoxitu*

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Abstract:

The academic research of *Chaoxitu* focuses mainly on the fiction of Wa and the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and the animal narrative has only been mentioned briefly in some studies, but there is no special research on the reasonableness and value of the construction of this perspective in the text. This paper mainly focuses on the unique perspective of animal narratives, and firstly discusses the rationality of the author's choice of animals through cultural symbols, the theory of animal "instrumentality" and strangeness. Then, through the perspective of other objects, the viewpoint of human beings as the subject is re-examined, so that animals are not in the position of silence, which shows the rationality of the animal narrative in *Chaoxitu*. Finally, through the perspective of the giant frog, the 19th-century Chinese old-fashioned school, the Western school, and the Westerners and their behavior are compared and contrasted, showing the complexity of the image of human beings and at the same time using it to express the harm produced by museums, and to give voice to the weaker groups. The conclusion is drawn that the author has rationally constructed an animal perspective in *Chaoxitu* and expressed the author's vision of a harmonious civilization between China and the West in the novel.

Keywords: *Chaoxitu*; animal narratives; strangeness

1. Introduction

From ancient times, animals have been closely related to human life. In Chinese mythology, animals such as dragons and phoenixes are endowed with people's expectations for life and living. The Trojan horse in Western Greek mythology and the serpent in the Book of Genesis have planted the seeds for the development of animal fiction. Animal perspective novels, which emerged in China in the 1980s, have had a

rather perfect and mature development. As a cultural phenomenon, it not only has a complex historical background, but also contains a profound aesthetic context. Initially, animal novels came from children's themes, and the novel authors in the 1980s expanded the theme orientation of children's literature to the rich animal world and created a series of excellent animal novels in the new period, which surpassed the old perspective of animal novels in China in the past

that animals are seen through people, and replaced it with the brand-new art of animals looking at human beings. Therefore, the theme of animal perspective novels starts from the non-human narrative perspective, breaks the traditional human-oriented narrative perspective, observes the characters, the world, and the society with the eyes of animals, and can speak what people cannot. In the principle of poetics of singularization proposed by Shklovsky. It is stated that the technique of art is the technique of singularization of things, the technique of making forms vague, increasing the difficulty and time of sensation, because the act of sensation in art is an end in itself and should be prolonged, causing strangeness in linguistic comprehension and feeling [1]. In reference, it is important to make those things that are taken for granted in real life into a linguistic sensation that has a new meaning and new vitality. For example,

I Am a Cat uses a common animal in life, cat, as the narrative perspective of the novel, so that readers can shift their perspective and experience the world from the cat's point of view. Essays that adopt the narrative perspective of animals have their own special features, including Kafka's Metamorphosis and Mo Yan's Fatigue of Life and Death. They all have different aesthetic implications.

The peculiarizing technique of *Chaoxitu* is to adopt the narrative form of the animal perspective, breaking the tradition and subverting the usual narrative perspective to achieve a strange narrative effect. People are viewed through the perspective of a giant frog, and judged again in the tone of a human being. Such a way of writing poses a challenge to the reader's already formed sense of automatism, and one can't help but think about how the animal evaluates the human being, thus producing the effect of strangeness. This paper focuses on how the author rationalizes the choice of animals while rationalizing the portrayal of animals, presents content that fits the animal narrative, and reflects the themes of *Chaoxitu*.

2. The Rationality of the Choice of Animals in *Chaoxitu*

Linzhao mentioned in the interview that she set the main character as a woman at the beginning of the creation, but she realized that it was difficult for human beings, especially women, to travel freely between the Lingnan area and the European continent in the 19th century [2]. So it was not possible to realize the theme that the author wished to present. After thinking, Linzhao suddenly thought that the main character could be "not a human being", and inspired by the geographical location and cultural meaning, she chose "Wa" as the main subject of the

narrative.

2.1 The Cultural Symbol of Frog

In ancient times, because the ancestors could not control the vast and fierce water, but production and life could not be separated from water, they became attached to water, reverence and worship. In order to overcome the flood, the ancestors can be in the water in the frog deification, so that it has become able to drive, overcoming the flood of the driving water spirit frog god. For example, the frog god pattern appeared in large quantities on the colored pottery of the Mafang period. Most of them were painted on two opposite sides, while the other two sides were painted with a square circle pattern indicating the fields, symbolizing that the fields had been protected by the frog god. At this time, the frog was no longer a simple totem, but a blessing deity of incomparable power capable of resisting floods and protecting the fields.

In *Chaoxitu*, the geographical location of the Xu families is precisely in the area of southern Fujian, where rivers, lakes and seas gather, and people make a living by fishing. At the beginning of the novel, during the typhoon period, there are dead bodies sent back by the tides every day, so Xinpo ties up Wa and hangs them on the top of the big mast for six days to pray for peace, and then there will be no dead bodies. Therefore, the novel embodies the cultural symbolism of Wa as amphibious creatures to resist flooding.

2.2 The "Instrumental Type" of Frog Image

Mr. Zhu Baorong once divided animal images into two categories, "anthropomorphic" and "instrumental", and pointed out that their difference lies in the fact that the anthropomorphic animal image itself is the direct object of the writer's aesthetic illumination, while the instrumental animal image is only used in a rhetorical sense [3]. The author informs the reader in the opening paragraph that the anthropomorphic animal image is the direct object of the writer's aesthetic perception, while the instrumental animal image is only used in a rhetorical sense [3]. Wa are fictional, and they belong to "feminine" after they are classified by physiological examination in terms of their appearance and H. However, giant frogs are different from other animals in that Wa can read and write and speak many languages, and they are endowed with the characteristics of "curiosity, fickleness, and fear of death", and they recognize new things by swallowing. They were given the traits of being "curious, fickle, and fearful of death", and were able to recognize new things by swallowing them. With these qualities, the giant frog came into the world and observed the world from its perspective. Wa portrayed

in *Chaoxitu* is a distinctive animal that belongs to the category of “instrumental”.

If Wa’s specialties and mind-boggling behaviors surprise the reader, the human-like characteristics of their habits help the reader to become more familiar with the main character and to develop a sense of intimacy with him. This combination of familiarity and strangeness is also a key part of shaping the Wa.

2.3 “Strangeness” Theory from Animal Perspective

In the early 19th century, the Russian formalist theorist Shklovsky put forward the theory of “strangeness” from the perspective of exploring the nature of art. He wrote in *Manipulation as Art* that in order to restore the sense of life, to feel things, and to make a stone a stone, there exists something called art. The purpose of art is to provide the sensation of things as they are seen, rather than merely recognized. The technique of art is to make things appear unfamiliar and forms obscure, thereby increasing the difficulty and duration of perception. This is because the experience of sensation in art is an end in itself and should be prolonged. Art is a method of experiencing the process of creation, while the final product is of no significance to art [4].

Chaoxitu is an application of the theory of “strangeness” in literature, and the animal point of view is also a kind of “strangeness” of the reader’s thinking, switching the reader’s familiar human way of thinking and behavioral patterns to non-human animals, increasing the reader’s artistic experience during the reading process. The animal point of view is also a kind of “strangeness” of the reader’s thinking.

3. The Plausibility of the Animal Narrative in *Chaoxitu*

3.1 Establishment of Fictional Objects

The protagonist Wa’s recognition of her “self” is a long process, and this recognition of herself and her environment continues throughout the first chapter. Wa’s name comes from Qijiajie, and it is she who confirms the frog’s name. “From this day forward, it shall no longer be called a big-headed freak; if it is, it shall be called Wa Zai! [5]” The name is Wa’s first knowledge of the world, and in subsequent stories, the name confirms her ‘identity’.

The sense of gender comes from the moment of her initial birth, when Qijiajie gave her the freedom to choose her own gender. In choosing her gender:

I look between the legs of the girl and the boy, where there

are dark couples, laments and poems. I pick. Qijiajie looks at me. The infantile male and female look at me. The mother looks at me. I crawl toward the boy. Ajin kicked me immediately: “Strange! Why don’t you become a girl?” Shui jumped out and pushed Ajin, “What’s so good about being a woman? You squat down to pee, you’re inferior! [5]”

This episode suggests that initially the two genders are equal for the frogs, and that gender is a “dark dyad, a dirge and a poem”, but in the social context there are differences [5]. A human is a person in a society, while a frog is an animal in nature, and choosing a gender is also choosing an identity to enter a society. This is also the Wa’s second perception of itself. Also, the low status of females in society is shown here, suggesting the later episode where Wa reacts to being found out that her gender is female. The fact that she chooses to be male but physically in a female body is a cognitive disconnect for Wa as she enters society, and it is when she discovers herself and recognizes her female identity that she truly understands the human idea of gender, which is an opportunity for her to further her understanding of the human race.

In addition, Wa’s perception of gender contains a lot of cut-off parts: on the one hand, the traditional Confucian thinking; on the other hand, the women’s resistance to the low social status and ritual oppression. The article mentions some of the words of Qijiajie. Qijiajie went up to point out: “Scrap Liang Shui, AJin married you is her past life sin karma, with you as a human being, worse than to be a whore on the ship! [5]” This sentence reflects the social background of the time very well, on the surface it is cursing Ashui. But in fact, it shows the tragedy of women, forced to marry. It is even more miserable to meet a bad person than to be a free prostitute, which also hints at the background of Qijiajie, and the women who are not free can not escape from this kind of tragedy. Wa is a free body from human society. It is the only free woman, so that Wa can recognize the world, traditional women do not have this kind of cognitive world, and it is not the only way to recognize the world. Traditional women do not have this freedom to recognize the world.

In terms of species, while exploring the world, Wa recognizes what she has in common with humans while recognizing what makes humans special. Wa has always had a vague perception of the differences in species. Until she is dissected, Wa clearly recognizes her differences. Wa’s feelings about being discriminated against and despised are incomplete, and she doesn’t care about these differences. But once she wishes to understand herself more about humanity, the negative effects of these differences hurt her more deeply. This is the double-edged sword that brings her closer to people.

3.2 Other-object Perspective

It is believed in animal narratives that animals, like other things, will not be affected by universal norms, and will perceive and present the human world in an alienated perspective with the help of the other's way of thinking from the other's point of view. In the novel, Wa is constantly shaping his perception of human society by devouring it and constitutes his multiple consciousnesses through his interactions Qijiajie and others while in Guangzhou. Under this fictionalized setting by the author, unlike ordinary animal narratives, Wa is influenced by universal norms. However, its method of examining the world remains distinct from the human perspective.

Humans define themselves as superior animals, the masters of all things, and animals serve humans. In the novel, even when the fishermen worship the giant frog as a god, they tie up the frog and raise it to the top of a large mast to hang it for six days, and glue on the eyelids so that the frog cannot close them, imposing their will on the animal. However, *Chaoxitu* shows more of Wa's perspective, which is characterized by avoiding an anthropocentric narrative perspective. In his observation of Bao Zai, Bao licking the mud, he writes that the mud also licks Bao Zai Bao, turning Bao Zai Bao into a mudbug, without making the human being the doer of the action; and in his encounter with H, the naturalist, H maintains that he is the one who has discovered Wa. However, Wa states that he himself has discovered and tracked down H, and then finally induced him to discover him; Wa puts the initiative of the action into his own hands, making himself the subject, and the human being the one to be watched. The human being becomes the watched party. Wa does not think that he is being watched even when he is examining Wa's eyepiece and the pattern on it with Qijiajie; Wa thinks that he is being watched from the inside and Qijiajie from the outside, and Wa looks at Qijiajie in the process and evaluates her life at this moment as a time of naivety. Wa's gaze above the human race, aware of the ups and downs of the entire human life course and poignant in pointing out the fleeting nature of life, is extremely short-lived because it will end up in shallow choices.

This paper revisits the idea of the human as a subject through the lens of the other, so that the animal is not in a position of silence. It is a strangeness of the narrative and at the same time a way for the author to revisit life.

4. Presentation of Chinese and Western Cultures from the Perspective of Animals

In *Chaoxitu*, Wa is captured by a boat-dwelling boy along

the Pearl River, and then travels from Guangzhou to Macau and finally arrives in Europe. However, Wa is not a collection of Chinese culture; it does not belong to any civilization from the very beginning. After coming ashore and living with the boat-dwelling families for a period of time, Wa observes the world through the lens of Oriental culture, learns about Oriental habits and ideas, and calls the Westerners "foreigners" just like the Orientals do. However, this is not an aversion and contempt for Westerners. After Wa came to Europe, through the education and influence of Shengtang, H and Minna, she felt and scrutinized the Western culture. After coming into contact with the two cultures, Wa's attitude is basically neutral, providing the reader with as much authenticity as possible in terms of how people in the East and West viewed each other in the early 19th century.

When Wa is about to leave Guangzhou for Macau, he wishes to find Qijiajie's ship to say goodbye to her, which is also Wa's way of saying goodbye to the previous culture when he is about to enter the other one. Since the Opium War in 1840, China's national crisis has been deepening, with many wars of aggression and the signing of many unequal treaties that led to the country's decline, and the previously brilliant Chinese civilization was regarded as inferior by Westerners. During this period, cross-cultural practices were characterized by conflicts of interests, cultures, and communication, and the old-fashioned people demonstrated their rejection and inferiority to Westerners. For example, Qijiajie, as the old guard, shows his dissatisfaction and betrayal of the giant frog following H. Qijiajie believes that Wa is contaminated with the "ghost plague", and satirized the frog that eat Westerners' food and should look down on the cheap food. She was once beaten up because the giant frogs had been in contact with foreigners. However, this time Qijiajie didn't hurt Wa, and she told Wa to run away from H and find a comfortable place to live happily. She also gave Wa the best blessings from the boat-dwelling family - a pond quail, a tangerine and a piece of red paper. Wa remembered this friendship, and then was deceived and killed by Shui in order to pay off Qijiajie's debt, ending the portrayal of her time in Guangzhou.

In Frog's point of view, the Westerners, represented by H., who speaks at the banquet about how the Orientals eat everything, and how the giant frog was born to one of the twin foot-wrapped women, are also prejudiced against the Orient. Such depictions reinforce the Western stereotype of the Orient as barbaric, ignorant, and mysterious. H has a genuine love for the frog, "born in the East," and when the giant frog is rescued by the Church of Notre Dame in an accident, he pays a large sum of money for it and confesses his love to the frog before choosing to commit sui-

cide, causing the frog to want to comfort the broken down naturalist in that moment.

However, in Frog's point of view, H's presentation of the museum is again cruel. In the novel, the frog in the process of seeing the production of specimens of things to do mortuary presented in the way: *"The dead body is dry, beautiful and clean you go well in the yellow spring road! are old grudges and leftover dreams, a hazy unwillingness. They are the ghosts that do not persist. Therefore, we have to overpower, to press the top, to put another layer of plywood on this set of paper coffins, wrap the rope around three times, pull it tight, and tie it down, so that they can't be stretched out for eternity, and so that the old grudges, dreams, and unwillingness will evaporate without a sound. [5]"* "Dead corpses" with "dry and clean and pretty" constitutes irony. "Old grudges, lost dreams and discontent" are eliminated through a series of forceful movements. Rinzok uses different fonts to highlight and emphasize the words "Some people are vegetative" and "You go well on your way to the Yellow Springs! [5]" Both lines show cruelty and criticism of the museum.

The frog witnesses the tragic death of the red-bellied woodcock and H's dissection of the field fowl in the next, showing the brutality and coercion of the museum from the description. The giant frog sees the red-bellied woodcock for the first time and thinks that it is a phoenix and that it has an ancient appearance. However, when he saw the red-bellied woodcock again after that month, it was the scene of a tragic death: "dead, but still bulging; eyes gouged out and replaced by two pills of glass; dragging the luxurious tail feathers a few feet long, standing on a fork of a tree that was also dead, lopsided, out of place all around, and emitting a pungent, dead odor [5]." The red-bellied woodcock was dead, the fork was dead, and the odor is dead, the branches are dead, and the smell is dead. The multiple occurrences of "dead" reveal strong emotions of anger and deplorable. In the scene where H. dissects the pheasant, the cruelty ends with the final words, "Nail a sign next to it, in the name of science, make everything legal and proper". The process causes severe discomfort and pain to the giant frog. The frog stimulates the sex hormones in the shock and begins to ovulate, swallowing the eggs in the way it knows the world - raw. Sadness was felt in the process in the form of bitterness. A sense of self begins to emerge. When H puts a testing instrument into the frog and begins to categorize it, the frog calls what H says "a judgment like a thin blade of steel", showing its accusation of this method [5].

Fung Hei, a painter in the same field of museum studies, is a representative figure of the fusion of East and West. As an orientalist, he was orphaned on the streets since childhood, and was later taken in by a priest, and decided

to become a painter after being amazed by his chance encounter with a ghost sketcher at the Whampoa Wharf. Because of Fung Hei and his work for Westerners, he is ridiculed and despised by the locals. However, he was firm in his belief that he was different from the old-fashioned school and longed to travel the world, believing that he could learn more by going to the West. Therefore, Feng Xi started out as a servant, and then followed James to learn sketching, business, etc. He was exposed to more Western culture, and gradually broadened his social network, and in less than a year, he expanded his studio and made a name for himself. Fung Hee resisted the influence of his birth and his environment on his own, and was determined to go out and realize his dream. However, as a museum worker, he is different from H's violent dismantling; he cares for the frog, and from the frog's point of view, Fung Hee is a person with "immaculate joy, sympathy and love in his eyes". Frog meets Feng Xi again after he is resurrected from his first death, believing that "Feng Xi is a great gift from my mother [5]." In Frog's view, Feng Xi is a person with "flawless joy and love in his eyes [5]." Feng Xi also gently comforts Frog when he is unable to accept too many new words. Unlike H, who treats the frog as a tool for profit, or Chee's sister, who makes the frog converge to the old-fashioned view through whipping, Feng Xi tells the giant frog not to waste its talent and not to become a plant trapped in the earth, placing people and things on an equal footing.

Three types of characters representative of the East and West in the nineteenth century are presented through the perspective of the giant frog. There is a difference between the old-fashioned orientalist represented by Sister Chee and the westerner represented by H in the perspective of the frog; although they both show a tendency to desire their attitudes to be recognized, Sister Chee does not make a profit out of the frog, whereas H's love for the frog is a desire to contribute to the study of museums to make a name for himself and to show a for the taming of the species. Feng Xi, as a fusion of Chinese and Western cultures, demonstrates not only the pursuit of self, but also the love for all things. The author shows the complexity of human beings through the perspective of a giant frog, aiming to expect that readers can explore the possibility of harmonious coexistence between China and the West from the complexity.

5. Conclusion

In literary narratives, animal narratives present more diversified contents with the liberation of people's thoughts: human beings are deformed into animals, animals are endowed with human thoughts when they are born, and

the combination of human beings and animals, and so on. Through this unique perspective, writers highlight the ecological dilemma, human alienation, survival and other social issues. This has enriched the scope of topics chosen for animal narratives as well as the depth of themes, making animal narratives a diverse narrative mode. However, in the writing of animal narratives, many writers ignore the original life attributes of animals, and continue to write from a human-centered perspective, which is not in line with the animal narratives.

In *Chaoxitu*, Linzhao makes reasonable use of animal narrative, choosing frogs, an animal that can run through the three places in the 19th century, and avoiding the anthropocentric narrative mode, taking animals as the main body, which emphasizes the author's neutral attitude towards the East and the West, and makes the story more realistic. The novel does not obviously show a certain kind of criticism of human nature, but through the outline of different characters, the author gives voice to the weak and marginalized characters in the contrast. Therefore, at the end of the text, by depicting the utopian ending of the frog living in harmony with the professor and the dog in a distant town, the author shows his vision of a harmonious civilization between China and the West. Through the analysis of the three dimensions, *Chaoxitu* conforms to

the definition of animal narrative and combines Cantonese and cross-cultural elements, establishing a broader space for subsequent animal narrative novels to be explored.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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