

Reflection on the modernization of the traditional Tibetan civilization in *The Dust Settles*

Yidan Zhang

School of Economics, Yunnan University, Kunming Yunnan 650504, P.R.China

Abstract:

This paper intends to synthesize the contents of previous studies, based on the text narrative and the modernity factors implied inside and outside the traditional Tibetan civilization, and explore how Alai used the practice of cross-language writing in *Dust Settled* to identify with the mainstream culture while opposing his gaze on the “other” of marginal culture construction, and to reflect on the modernization of traditional civilization in the process of individual to civilization.

Keywords: The Dust Settles; The fool narrative; Modernization; Seek root; Orientalism

1. Introduction

Most of the existing studies on *The Dust Settles* focus on the analysis of characters and the comparison with other works, among which the number of papers on the modernization of Tibetan civilization is relatively small. The perspective of the paper written by Shouxiang Fu is the modernity factor contained in the traditional Tibetan culture. [9] In the content, it focuses on the external introduction of modern civilization and makes the modern transformation of Tibetan civilization. This paper discusses how to use cross-anguange writing practice of marginal culture in the identity of the mainstream culture, based on the text narrative and implicit modernity factors of the traditional Tibetan civilization, reflects on the modernization of traditional civilization, and proposes the reconstruction of oriental culture.

2. The fool narrative under the pursuit of the theme

The theme of seeking roots in “*The Dust Settles*” is the pursuit of self and civilization. Xiaodong Wu think “every generation rewrites a pursuit story that is the story of individual and constitute the story of the human beings”. [14] In “*The Dust Settles*”, constantly pursue process of self reshape understanding of the pursuit of the story, and the pursuit of the individual represents the roots of traditional Tibetan civilization, also represents the national civilization.

The theme of self-pursuit is manifested that “I” get rid of the “mask” forced to wear under the gaze of others and find the true self. Yutong Liu believes that the relationship between other and self is that other stares at the subject and instill other’s understanding of the subject. [7] In this environment, the subject constantly thinks about who I am and what position I am in, so as to defines self. When “I” first arrived in the world, my self-awareness has not yet been formed. People around me stare

at me, concluded that “I” is a fool according to “I” is different from ordinary people and put a fool’s mask on me. Wearing the mask of a fool is bound, but it makes “I” closer to the true self and free, which creates a paradox. Brooks used the paradox to distinguish between scientific language and poetry language, arguing that the words in poetic language are constantly modified and violate their original meaning in the dictionary. The meaning of the mask in the dictionary is a face protector, extended to camouflage. In “*The Dust Settles*”, fool mask disguised the purest nature of “I” to a certain extent. “I” always appears as the image of two people. When “I” standing in the foreground does things or speaks according to the logic of the fool, the hidden “I” is commented and corrected. Wearing the mask,” I “and the true self often appear at the same time, the narrative changes between the two.

Alai is a Han-Tibetan writer, and his hometown Jiarong is geographically located in remote Tibetan areas. He is neither the orthodox sect of Tibetan culture, nor the pure Han nourished by the strong culture of Han nationality. Xinjian Xu seized Alai’s “crevice area identity” and analyzed his embarrassing state not only did not affect his creation, but also was the deep reason for the achievement of his artistic uniqueness. [15] In the process of “*The Dust settles*”, another Tibetan writer, Zhaxidawa, which was not submerged by the conflict and the tension of public opinion and stood out from the cognitive vision of the Han nationality. In addition, to write Tibetan stories in Chinese makes his characters have two perspectives, and “I” can move freely in two opposing history-cultural space. “My” mother is a Han woman married to Tibetan chieftain, who views Tibetan civilization from the perspective of the Han nationality. While “I” plays a role in shifting the perspective of the Han nationality to the narrative perspective of “Tibetan roots”. Shaogong Han believes that the cultural roots that various nationalities want to look for are “slang, wild history, legends, jokes, folk songs, gods

and strange stories, customs, sexual methods, etc.” [16] With the help of “I”, the unique natural civilization landscape and chieftain system culture of the Tibetan region are presented to the public, and the comparative conflict and integration of Han and Tibetan civilizations are showed. All these reflect the dual nature of Alai, including the double family identity and double language ability.

3. Reflection in the process of modernization of traditional Tibetan civilization

The impact of modern civilization in the 1990s will surely lead to the replacement of the traditional decadent chieftain system by modern civilization. Modern civilization deeply shakes the faith of the Tibetan people with its powerful assimilation force, giving the Tibetan people spiritual trauma. The opposition and transformation between tradition and civilization in *The Dust settles* are concentrated in the three aspects of economy, regional system and cultural belief. Alai lingers in the three aspects between traditional civilization and modern civilization, and has a dual attitude of both affirmation and doubt, reflecting his reflection on the radical side in the process of modernization of traditional civilization.

In the process of modernization of traditional civilization, the economic foundation was first shaken. The introduction of the market in the reign of the chieftains overturned the economic foundation of traditional slavery. Commissioner Huang brought poppies and modern guns to the chieftain. The poppy squeezed the grain planting space of the people, leading to the famine, and the second young master of the chief took the opportunity to buy and sell grain to establish a trade market and create a prosperous situation. When the limited commodity market and capital are occupied by opium, the normal development of national commercial trade will be fundamentally suppressed. The huge economic wealth and trade market brought by the poppy seem to have dragged the Tibetan area into the modernization process and brought it commercial prosperity, but in fact, the torrent of desire carnival flooded the Tibetan area and shook the traditional economic foundation of collecting wealth through tax exploitation under the chieftain system. The introduction of opium poppy, the prosperity of the market, and the protection of modern guns not only mean that the implied modernity factors have penetrated into the traditional Tibetan civilization, but also mean the birth of the new civilization and the destruction of the old civilization.

Because the traditional Tibetan civilization is located in the interior of Chinese mainland, it is less sensitive to the

changes of the coastal area. Therefore, when the wave of modernization reaches the Tibetan area, the Tibetan nation has to experience far more pain than the coastal zone in the center of the whirlpool. Because chieftain is far away from the central Plains and coastal areas in the center of political and economic struggle and located in the deepest part of Chinese mainland, when the eastern region had accepted modern civilization, the Tibetan area still kept the traditional slave social model, with only the concept of slave, free man, king and chieftain in life. When the modern civilization suddenly broke into the Tibetan area, the Tibetan people felt a great shock from a series of dazzling new things and concepts. When it was too late to digest, they passively obeyed, accepted and entered modernization. On the one hand, this shows the rapid transformation of China’s modernization; on the other hand, it see the absurdity of the transformation of modern civilization from the perspective of the Tibetan people: the Tibetan people do not know what a country is, and they are confused about the modern nation state to be established. From the perspective of Tibetan area, it eliminated the sanctity and seriousness of constructing modern nation state, and completed the criticism and reflection on the radical way of modernization.

In addition, the traditional Tibetan have experienced thousands of years of slavery indoctrination and lived an unchanging life. The modernization process of history suddenly and forcefully required them to cross the existing moral and institutional concepts and quickly step into the kingdom they did not understand. In this process, the Tibetan nation needs to bear both the spiritual changes and the material changes, thus resulting in a painful and lost mood. Having personally experienced such mental pain, the rationality of the rapid and intense way in the process of modernization were questioned from a humanitarian perspective. In addition, traditional culture such as religious beliefs are broken in the process of modernization. The living Buddha, the representative of the divinity, the representative of the secular power, and the tongue for resisting the secular desire and adhering to the religious divinity, which shows that the traditional religious divinity gradually gave way to the secular, and the faith of the Tibetan nation experienced loss and interruption, to the final aphasia of the divinity. The disappearance of some traditional civilizations violates the modern concept of diversification and shows the homogenization and identity in modern thinking.

4. The pursuit and reflection of cultural identity in the process of modernization

American scholar Edward Said clearly stated that “Orientalism”

refers to “For Europe, the East is neither a pure fiction or fantasy of Europe, nor a natural existence, but a theoretical and practical system created by humans, containing material content accumulated over a long history.”[1] Eastern civilization was established based on the imagination of Western civilization. On the basis of Said’s “Orientalism”, Alai summed up external Orientalism and internal Orientalism. External orientalism refers to “the imagination of the center zone to the marginal zone, relatively mainstream culture and other cultures.” Internal Orientalism refers to the country or nation is influenced by external orientalism. For instance, some writers actively proofread their own perspectives and expressions so as to adapt to and cater to the standards of the audience, and form the same orientalist tendency within themselves. *The Dust Settles* has an obvious orientalism tendency, which advocates the subversion of Tibetan narrative with Oriental vision and the insertion of modern ideas into traditional civilization on the basis of the real source of Tibetan traditional civilization in the works of the new century.

5. Conclusion

Regional writing has always been a common theme in literary creation, but it has different meanings in different regions and historical backgrounds, thus possessing rich connotations. In recent years, writing based on geography has gradually attracted people’s attention. In this process, it will involve how contemporary innovation breaks through the constraints of tradition when all works in the same region are written by predecessors. In the old works about Tibet, most of them regard Tibet as the last pure land of modern civilization, take the imaginary Tibet as the object, praise the purity and unrestrained Tibet, and make Tibet sacred and religious. However, it ignores the real living conditions faced by the Tibetan people in the face of the transformation of the old and the new, and also ignores the changes in the Tibetan people’s spirit and lifestyle under the invasion of modern civilization. As Tibetans, they opposed the mainstream civilization, pursued the fringe civilization, and shaped Tibet into a “pastoral” place where they could escape the mainstream civilization, so they proposed Orientalism. While pursuing the roots of traditional Tibetan civilization, they also pay attention to the reality of the Tibetan world and the painful course of the people, causing people to reflect on the unreasonable phenomena in the process of modernization.

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