

Zhou Zuoren's Beijing Feelings in the Book of Rainy Days

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Abstract: In Zhou Zuoren's narrative, the notion of hometown encompasses not only the distinction of geographical regions but also the location of his spirit. This paper examines Zhou Zuoren's expression of Beijing regional culture in *the Book of Rainy Days* from the perspective of regional culture and prose. Zhou Zuoren pays attention to the realistic scenery of Beijing through his poetic writing. This kind of writing not only explains his feelings about Beijing, but also enables readers to feel his attitude towards life and sincere nostalgia for the place where he lives, and also shows his ideal new civilization and social order. More precisely, Zhou Zuoren's writing of Beijing's humanistic nature shows his resistance to the control of some forces in reality. On the other hand, behind these resistance movements, his vigilance against the retro forces is hidden, thus showing his criticism of the legacy of the old civilization and advocating a social civilization endowed with human feelings.

In his article, Zhou Zuoren talked about the influence of eastern Zhejiang on his character. He said, in preface 2 of *The Book of Rainy Days*, "The influence of the customs of Vietnam and China in these 400 years is very deep, which has made me an indelible character of eastern Zhejiang, which is enough for the world to call it 'the spirit of being a teacher'." [1] It can be seen that the region has a subtle influence on the writer's creation. The influence of this region on writers is also reflected in their works, such as *Hulan River* written by Xiao Hong, *Xiangxi* written by Shen Congwen, and *Beijing Flavor* written by Lao She. In their works, most of them have a strong regional flavor, which is inseparable from their own experiences and personal understanding. Zhou Zuoren has traveled to many places all his life, and he himself admits in the book *Place and Literature*: "The local customs are closely related to the residents, and everyone knows it. Therefore, the literature of various countries has its own characteristics, and the redemption of a country can also show a different style because of the region." [2] In the *Book of Rainy Days*, readers can clearly feel Zhou Zuoren's nostalgia for Beijing.

1. Zhou Zuoren in Beijing

In *Hidden Show*, Liu Xie discusses the influence of the geographical environment on the writer and his literary style, saying, "When the wind blows and the grass fades, the horses on the side are homesick, and they are hurt by cold gas." [3] Coincidentally, Zhong Rong also said: "Animals with qi are touching things, so they shake their temperament and dance in various forms" [4], pointing out

the influence of geography and climate on people. The change of qi affects things, and the ups and downs of things touch people and affect people's temperament. In *Geography of Hanshu*, Ban Gu talked about the relationship between regions, customs, and people: "All people believe in the nature of the five permanents, but their rigidity and softness are different, which is the wind of the soil and water, so it is called the wind; likes and dislikes, movements and deaths, with the lust of the monarch, so it is called vulgar." ^[5] It can be seen that different regions have influenced the writer's creative style because of their different natural landscapes and cultural customs.

Zhou Zuoren has lived in Beijing for half of his life, and Beijing is the city he has lived in the longest in his life. "It can be said that Beijing is the beginning of his purposeful and rational writing of local culture." ^[6] On the one hand, the writing of local scenery in Beijing is influenced by Beijing's regional space and political context; on the other hand, it is influenced by the strong academic atmosphere of new literature since the May 4th Movement. "Without the experience of living in Beijing, Zhou Zuoren's writing on Jiangnan folklore and Japanese culture must have lacked the contrasting tones." ^[7] In *The Book of Rainy Days*, Zhou Zuoren uses the rain, the sound of birds, and the food of Beijing as the objects of his work, recounting the city's scenery and his understanding of the city.

Beijing is a city that can inspire people's strong feelings. Here, scholars who lived in Beijing left behind countless works closely related to the city. Similarly, new intellectuals like Zhou Zuoren also wrote voluminous articles. On the surface, these intellectuals have also given Beijing a lot of attention, but they will not have a strong sense of identity with Beijing like old Beijing scholars. Zhou Zuoren faced the era of the Republic of China, and Beijing was in transition. But it can't be ignored that Peiping culture is also an important part of Zhou Zuoren's literary thought.

Modern Beijing, with its unique urban character, attracts literati and scholars with various ideological beliefs to gather here, and in the process of modernization, they cast different figures in their own ways. It also seems that only here can human talent, wisdom, and essence fully blossom and be brought into full play. During the New Culture Movement, Zhou Zuoren came to Beijing, the source of the movement. At this time in Beijing, a hundred schools of thought were competing for attention, and culture was confronting the East and the West. Zhou Zuoren, like other scholars, left a rich and colorful stroke. In the course of Zhou Zuoren's life, Beijing can be said to have accepted him for half of his life. In 1917, he was invited by Cai Yuanpei to go north and become a professor at Peking University. It was also at Peking University that he became acquainted with intellectuals such as Mr. Ming, Mr. Xiao, Qian Xuanton, and Liu Bannong. His communication and ideological collision with them, as well as the strong academic atmosphere around Peking University and the social and political environment at that time, can be said to promote the development of his thoughts and the creation of his works to a certain extent. The conflict between old and new ideas, geographical factors, and the influence of the political environment have made scholars and gifted scholars resonate deeply in their thoughts. Zhou Zuoren, on the other hand, used the Bitter Rain Lodge as a place of exchange, regularly organizing activities as well as accepting scholars and writers from home and abroad, and used newspapers and magazines such as *Ta Kung Pao* as a position to issue magazines for literary exchanges and creations.

2. The natural scenery of Beijing

In *The Book of Rainy Days*, Zhou Zuoren did not write as much about the grass, trees, fish, and insects in Beijing as he did in his hometown of Eastern Zhejiang, and he regretted the lack of natural features in Beijing. The title of *The Book of Rainy Days* contains a hint of melancholy and sullenness. In Zhou Zuoren's *Nostalgia for the Tileter Country*, he also makes it clear that Beijing's weather and climate make him bored and uncomfortable, and that the bright spring is so short-lived

that one can't feel its existence.

A glance at the title of *Bitter Rain* shows that Zhou Zuoren did not like the natural object "rain" much and was even quite annoyed by it. The rain in Beijing is concentrated in July and August, and it comes with great momentum. The rain in the yard overflowed the steps and the west study. Therefore, the rain in Peiping made Zhou Zuoren very upset, and the rain and the sound of rain were even more annoying. In contrast, Zhou Zuoren missed the rain in his hometown. There will be no water accumulation on the stone road, so there is a boat to take when you go out. It is even more pleasant to enjoy the rainy scenery by boat and listen to the rain under the window. The small courtyard where Zhou Zuoren lives is low-lying. When it rains, it is difficult to drain, hence the name of the bitter rain.

In the article, although Zhou Zuoren "feels very close to the water,"^[1] he said that "many seas' like puddles in Beijing are really not very satisfied, and it is not a pity that there is no such water".^[1] This is not only his dissatisfaction that the sea in Beijing is not as broad and vibrant as the waters in his hometown, but also his attitude towards the rain in the two places, which are worlds apart. The rain in Beijing "makes me very sad".^[1] Zhou Zuoren is distressed that the rain in the night has collapsed the west wall and the south wall, repeatedly attracting the presence of the Liang Menzi, and the monotonous sound of the rain throughout the night makes him unable to sleep peacefully and wake up repeatedly. And the smell of the water receding after the heavy rain is really disgusting. These and the black-topped boat outside "create a dream-like poetry"^[1] of the rain by the boat in the wind, as well as imagined friends in a mule train in the desert in the rain drinking soda pop in the pleasure of the formation of a stark contrast. In the face of "rain" as a natural object, due to the different environments, the emotions and state of mind are naturally inconsistent.

In Zhou Zuoren's writing, the sound of toads and the rainy day are a kind of natural correlation, and the sound of birds and spring are also a kind of natural correlation. In the article "*Bird Sound*", Zhou Zuoren said at the beginning that "spring is chirped by birds", linking bird song with spring. However, it is regrettable that even at this time he lived in the northwest corner of Beijing, which is close to the countryside with many trees, but he seldom heard the chirping sound of birds that can fly freely and act in response to the season. The birds here in Zhou Zuoren's view, not referring to chickens, ducks, and poultry, but sparrows, pigeons, and woodpeckers, make such calls sound like emotionless birds—trivial, dry—and can perceive the change of the season and the pursuit of freedom of the birds; their calls can represent the flow of the season. Zhou Zuoren then quotes the poet Nash's poem, which lists four birds: Cuckoo (i.e., Bogu), jug-jug (i.e., nightingale), pee-wee (controversial), to-sitta-woo (i.e., owl), and there is also an ancient Greek poetess who thought along the same lines as Zhou Zuoren, associating birds with spring, and who saw the nightingale as a messenger of spring. As a child, Zhou Zuoren heard the owl's call, which is "more interesting than any sound of wind, cock, or bird,"^[1] or "as if it were the shaking of a drum of a cargo man"^[1] or "as if it were a cry of 'digging puddle' "^[1]—the owl hooting, but regrettably, near the end of the article, Zhou Zuoren said that "for Beijing, these kinds of songs are not ".^[1] There are only crows that sing all year round in Beijing, which are noisy and unpretentious. In contrast, the trivial and dry songs of sparrows and woodpeckers have an advantage—in the end, they still contain some springtime".^[1]

3. Food in Beijing

Hao Ruirui's *Aesthetic Taste of Zhou Zuoren's Gourmet Prose* said, "He recalled his hometown with delicious food and expressed his feelings about life, his pursuit of knowledge, his concern for civilian culture, and his thoughts on folk culture. Zhou Zuoren wandered in the long corridor of food, savoring the vicissitudes of the world and sharing his homesickness and nostalgia. In today's

urgent need to raise eating to a spiritual level, it is undoubtedly a spiritual enjoyment to experience the astringency and simplicity in Zhou Zuoren's food prose." [8]

Everywhere Zhou Zuoren went, as a food lover, he was naturally most concerned about the food in Beijing. When Zhou Zuoren first arrived in Beijing, his food there did not leave him with a good impression. Tea in the guild hall where he lives is especially rough, which is incompatible with the way Zhou Zuoren always yearns for literati to eat tea. For daily meals, Zhou Zuoren usually eats fried meatballs and hot and sour soup, and the utensils used to hold rice are also very rough. The only advantage is probably that the price is cheap. It turns out that these foods are only meant to meet people's physiological needs, and there is no need to pay attention to the art of eating. The long-term status of the imperial capital has not improved Beijing's food culture. It turns out that the purpose of Beijingers' pursuit of secular life is to eat only to satisfy their physical needs, but to lack aesthetic life pursuit. Zhou Zuoren, as a literati full of beautiful imagination about Beijing, found that Beijing had not been cultivated in many subtle way, that is, as far as tea and food were concerned, he never knew anything special and tasty. Living in the ancient capital without refined or decadent snacks containing history is a big defect for Zhou Zuoren.

In 1924, Zhou Zuoren wrote *Tea and Food in Beijing*. *The article*, written from a book, recalled that he had lived in Beijing for a long time and said he did not eat with the history of Beijing, the culture commensurate with the dim sum, and that there is no good dim sum or tea food in Beijing. As to why Zhou Zuoren valued dim sum so much when it seemed to be of little practical use, he said, "We must have a little bit of useless play and enjoyment in addition to the daily necessities in order to make life interesting. We look at the sunset, look at the river in autumn, look at flowers, listen to the rain, smell the fragrance, drink the wine that does not seek to quench the thirst, and eat the snacks that do not seek to be full, which are necessary for life. Although it is a mediocre decoration, the more refined, the better. It is a pity that the life of Chinese people now is extremely dull and rough." [1] It can be seen that for the "useless things" in life, Zhou Zuoren thinks that it is these seemingly useless things that embellish the interest of life. This article is light, casual, and natural, revealing between the lines a recognized attitude and desire for life's leisure and entertainment. However, in reality, for the twentieth century, Chinese goods to spice up life, Zhou Zuoren has also said, "a little bit, not like, crude imitation of goods, called national goods, to sell more expensive than foreign goods." [1] The reason for this is that at this time, Beijing students see the influence of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, more to the West as the trend, and for the Chinese culture itself, the importance of some dilution, so for Zhou Zuoren, at this time, the life in Beijing is the lack of his favorite interesting, which is a great pity for Zhou Zuoren.

In *Tea and Food in Beijing*, he expresses his nostalgia for his hometown's tea and his disdain for the Westernized goods of modern China. In Beijing, a city that is modernizing, Beijing's scenery is bound to show the characteristics of a half-foreigner. In this process, the Westernization of Chinese food and other products has lost the kind of national identity that was originally attached to them. On the one hand, this reflects Western civilization's rewriting of Chinese culture, and on the other hand, it also reflects the despiritualization process of food. Food has lost its original folk flavor. At this time, food is just the food itself; it does not pay attention to color, aroma, or taste, and it only becomes a tool for people to satisfy their hunger. Zhou Zuoren wrote about Beijing tea not only to write about eating but also to express his inner regret. At this time, China was experiencing the National New Culture Movement, which was quite radical for life and society. In such a desperate environment, it was difficult for people to spend time and think about how to appreciate the surrounding things and the inherited traditional culture.

4. Conclusion

Different regions bear different emotional tendencies of the authors, and when they treat regional things with different mentalities, they will naturally show different characteristics in the text. In *The Book of Rainy Days*, Zhou Zuoren describes the scenery of Beijing and his understanding of the city by taking the rain, birds, and food in Beijing as his objects of creation. He calmly builds his own cultural kingdom and finds profound meaning in the current events he sees and experiences in his eyes, which makes his works possess valuable depth and strength.

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