

The “Home View” of Overseas Chinese Literature

Gao Zhidong

School of Chinese Language and Culture, Zhejiang Yuexiu University
No. 2801 Middle Qunxian Rd., Yuecheng District, Shaoxing, 312000, China
Email: 472946489@qq.com

Abstract Overseas Chinese literature is the cultural creation of Chinese writers who have moved and lived abroad, and it is also a new category in world literature. An important focus of the works of these writers is the allelopathy of new and old home, which the author calls a new “home view” of Chinese literature. As these people have moved away from their home, the new “home view” of their overseas Chinese literature contains rich psychological changes and poetic ideals, inheriting the past and initiating the future, warming up the “old” and opening up the “new,” profound and lingering, friendly and reserved, literary but satirical, and harmonizing so as to transform. These elements constitute a charming cross-cultural character. This article explores its origins, observes its transitions, and follows the progression of the levels of “native home,” “cultural home” and “spiritual home” to interpret the boundless aesthetic world displayed by this group of writers.

Keywords overseas Chinese literature; home consciousness; aesthetic world

Author **Gao Zhidong** is Associate Professor at the School of Chinese Language and Culture, Zhejiang Yuexiu University (Shaoxing 312000, China). His main research interests include modern and contemporary Chinese literature, overseas Chinese literature and comparative literature.

The “home” in the geopolitical sense and the “home” in the literary sense form a dialectical and complementary relationship of heterogeneous entanglement between the real and the ideal levels. In terms of aesthetic imagery, literature and life present a spiritually purified world that is mutually reinforcing. The overall grasp of the picture of survival in overseas Chinese literature provides a new perspective of “home consciousness” for the academic community. The systematic exploration

of overseas Chinese literary texts in the context of home and the discussion of the literary meanings arising from it are undoubtedly of positive and constructive significance for the construction of “a community with a shared future for mankind (人類命運共同體)” (Dai and Han 56).

Exploring the Cultural Origin of “Home Consciousness”

Human beings have a long history of “home consciousness.” Among the Chinese and Western philosophical thoughts, the *I Ching* (《易經》), also translated as *The Book of Changes* can be considered the earliest one. With the relationship between heaven and man as its core, this Chinese classic reveals the ancient wisdom of existence that “good life is virtue” and “life is never ending,” in which “home consciousness” is embedded. For example, the two trigrams of *Qian* (乾) and *Kun* (坤), which say “Great is Qianyuan, the beginning of all materials (大哉乾元，萬物資始)”¹ (Huang and Zhang 177) and “To Kunyuan, all things are born (至哉坤元，萬物資生)” (Ibid), reveal the innate “home consciousness” of the natural ecology of heaven and earth as the basis of human existence. and “*Fu Gua* (復卦),” the twenty-fourth trigram in *I Ching*, reflects the Chinese philosophical thinking of “easy change,” with the interpretation that all things must return to the fundamental law, so that the idea of “humanistic home” is revealed and acquired. Thus, in ancient Chinese philosophy, “home consciousness” not only has the superficial concept of “homesickness” and “homecoming,” but also has the deeper purpose of resetting *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽) and the implication of returning to the true existence. It has the philosophical connotation of bridging the primitive and civilized cultures.

The *Bible* places the innocent home of mankind in the Garden of Eden and refers to the Lord’s “Promised Land” in Jerusalem (Feng, et al 98-99). In fact, evil was inherent in the Garden of Eden, and the “Promised Land” is a place of constant killing and destruction to this day. The *Odyssey* is an epic of “homecoming,” but the home has been changed so often that it has become a place of vicious fighting. There was no greater tragedy of destroying humans, homes and countries than the Second World War, when the German, Japanese and Italian Axis countries committed untold crimes against the people of the world. Home is a beautiful place to live in, but it is also a memory written in blood and tears. Philosophers and wise men have been thinking about home without interruption. Martin Heidegger is one of the Western philosophers with a strong sense of “home.” In his case, “home consciousness” is an integral component of his existentialist

1 The citations from *I Ching* (《易經》) in this article are translated by the author.

philosophy. In 1927, in his book *Being and Time*, Heidegger discussed the notion of "being in this world" around the living mode of "human existence and the world," with special emphasis on "dwelling," "sojourn," and "attachment," which are closely related to "home." He points out, "according to human experience and history, all that is essential and great emerge only from the fact that man has a home and has taken root in a tradition" (Heidegger 127). His causal ideas such as "being and the world" and "man and heaven" reveal the relationship between philosophy and aesthetics with its origin. His exposition of the roundelay among "Heaven, Earth, God, and Man" expands the ideal of home in a very broad sense. The poetic sense of home is thus raised to an aesthetic realm.

As a kind of "cross-border" localized writing, overseas Chinese literature is a kind of peaceful creation. There is no religious intimidation, nor is there a vicious hobby of conquering cities and land, but rather a literary expression of these Chinese writers' adherence to international law and the laws and regulations of their host countries. It is a "poetic dwelling" that inherits the mother theme of the Chinese benevolence and beauty of "home." In the sorrow at separation and happiness in union of overseas homes, Chinese writers cultivate the seeds of reaching the acme of perfection, and describe the justice and evil, the coldness and warmth in the disaster of home. Through the changes of history and the transformation of time and space, these writers write about the hardships of Chinese people who leave their home, go to the sea, and make a living abroad in different contexts, presenting their individuality and progressiveness in the aesthetic sense, and portraying their mental journey and cultural identity, as well as their international image of reshaping themselves and their new home. For example, by combing the non-universal "home" images such as "long journey," "back figure," "flying bird" and "drifting," these writers let readers feel the unique poetic connotation and cultural significance of overseas Chinese literature. In popular terms, Chinese writers use their pens as plowshares to sow the seeds of benevolence for their survival in foreign countries, and to draw portraits of overseas Chinese individuals or groups who have taken root in other countries. At first, they seek common ground while reserving differences with the indigenous people of the host country, and practice cultural complementarity, and then they rely on each other and work together to build a home of solidarity and coexistence.

The Transformation of "Home Consciousness"

What "home consciousness" seeks is the "overall mind map" of overseas Chinese literature. While reflecting the "reality" (Ni 46), it also hopes to reach the "reality

supported by distinctive ideas,” trying to bring a broader meaning to literary texts. However, an inescapable reality is that researchers, like writers, are experiencing a complex quest that requires both literary perspective and ethical criticism. It is needless to say that early studies focused on “nostalgia” and “separation” in overseas Chinese literature, and lacked pertinent analysis and philosophical arguments on the generation, change and establishment of a new “home consciousness” in the context of globalization, and often neglected the in-depth narration of life and death, love and hate in the texts, especially the exploration of the theme of ethical choices in Chinese literature.

Therefore, the real demand for constructing “home consciousness” is to rebuild “a holistic understanding of the historical course of overseas Chinese literature,” and the historical reality of overseas Chinese and the textual expression of Chinese literature, as well as the related critical studies, are precisely in the context of a holistic understanding of “home.” It is in the holistic understanding of “home” that we can produce works and doctrines that are deeply touching. In this sense, it is clear that “home consciousness” and its theoretical exploration have become quite important, and at the same time have raised increasingly diverse and multidimensional academic demands. Readers and theorists should rely as much as possible on the context of the times and literary texts to grasp the transformation of overseas Chinese literature.

How can we observe both the subtleties and the motivations of this field of study, i.e., discover its implications and reasonable interests? There are three levels of “home consciousness” that should be particularly noted, which could be called. The author calls them “native home,” “cultural home” and “spiritual home” (Jiang Shaochuan 113). These three levels are intertwined and integrated, constituting three important nodes in the path of transmutation, so it is necessary to examine them in a holistic and dynamic structure. The advantages of this approach are twofold: first, it facilitates the re-grasping of the structure of overseas Chinese literature and its changes, and second, it helps to sort out its historical and cultural contexts, so as to uncover the ethical value of multiculturalism. This is an all-around care and hierarchical point tracking, grasping the phenomenon of “retrospection, independence and conflict” in overseas Chinese literature and deciphering the deep texture of “respect, reconciliation and pluralism” in a cultural environment where multi-ethnic people live together and various civilizations intermingle.

A deeper reading will make it clear that “native home” is at the physical level, with obvious regional markers, and the region is mostly a mixed consciousness of duality, with both the sentiment and various feelings of the hometown and the new

home, while the "cultural home" is at the ideological level. It is the new concept and new thought of overseas Chinese survival, the message of identity, and the many trials and tribulations of the new life and its current human-ego communication field; the "spiritual home," on the other hand, is at the level of values, or beyond the limitations of "native home," "foreign land," "national border" and their relevant ideology. It is an ecological environment of human coexistence and a living field of common beauty through boundaries. The system of "home consciousness" thus constituted is like multiple mirrors, giving their works the subtle qualities of "transformation" and "sensation" and "change" and "access." In popular terms, most of the writers' works up to this realm are concerned with both inward-looking in-depth space and outward-looking open field, absorbing cultural factors and concentrating local imagery with the aesthetic form of interplay between reality and fiction, between emotion and reason, making "home consciousness" a place to purify the soul.

From the perspective of structural storytelling, most overseas Chinese literature has its own special contextual and individualized narrative style, with thematic ideas rising and falling, characters in staggered plots, hidden or revealed, urgent or slow, obscured or isolated, placed in a scenario of cultural mixing and gradual integration, with charm and bitterness, showing the personal feelings and literary expressions of Chinese people in the course of immigration. These Chinese writers combine the old and the new "home view" with the different and intertwined "sense of existence" into a single furnace, forging the patterns of survival and the pursuits of overseas Chinese value, and striving to create a cultural context of commonality and universality among human beings. It is constructive to understand this point in order to deeply grasp the characteristics of overseas Chinese literature.

From Native Home to Cultural Home

The early overseas Chinese literature was influenced by the traditional mother culture, showing the examination, reflection and attachment to the "root" culture, and at the same time, it was also influenced by the local culture, reflecting the ideology that the new home belongs to the mainstream culture of the region. Most of the Chinese writers belong to the former group, describing the unfamiliarity and discomfort brought about by the experience of spatial migration, and conveying the confusion of identity, culture, status and other distortions and dislocations during their travels to foreign countries by describing the psychological shocks caused by such factors as cultural conflicts and external changes, showing the

creative mentality of stumbling and turning around to look back, with a particularly strong sense of cognitive awareness of “home.”

In terms of literary expressions, the theme of “nostalgia” and “searching for roots” is highlighted, and the narrative content is mostly about the nostalgia for the “home,” and the narrative techniques tend to be plain and simple. The representative works include Yu Lihua’s novel *Seeing Palms Again*, *Seeing Palms Again*, Cha Jianying’s novel *Glacier Under the Jungle*, Nie Hualing’s novel *Mulberry Green and Peach Red*, Su Wei’s novel *The Back figure*, Sima Tapping’s prose “The Bright Moon Comes from the Water,” and the poems written by members of the “Sirius Poetry Club” of Mahua Literature. The early overseas Chinese literature is a series of poems written by members of the Sirius Poetry Society. The “home consciousness” of the early overseas Chinese literature was one way, showing the expatriates’ spiritual dilemma “after pursuing the dream,” and the writing “in other countries” was still difficult to be separated from the “dream of the home.” They are bound by the spiritual burden of national history, feeling the strong conflict of heterogeneous cultures, and trying to use pure literary “strokes” to cut through the “siege” of the region and to return to the home of their native land.

An exploration of the evolution of “home consciousness” necessarily involves the reconstruction of the “I” and its cultural identity. As overseas Chinese increasingly integrate into the politics, economy, culture, and life of their current places of residence, their subjective consciousness is constantly changing, and the form of literary expression also changes accordingly. As a result, overseas Chinese literature, while maintaining the original Chinese cultural tradition, has begun to take root in a cultural space different from that of the “native home,” showing a new “cultural home consciousness.” This shift in literary subjective consciousness reveals that the new generation of immigrants has jumped out of the shackles of identity and taken a rational look at the heterogeneous culture, and their “home consciousness” has also consciously formed a new stability and adaptability in the trend of cultural identity, trying to build a huge historical picture through a literary perspective that includes the history of the development of Chinese national civilization, the history of overseas Chinese settlement and immigration and the history of personal destiny. The representative works include Cao Guilin’s novel *A Native of Beijing in New York*, Zhou Li’s novel *Chinese Women in Manhattan*, Wang Zhou Sheng’s novel *The Accompanying Lady*, Zhang Ling’s novel *Crossing the Other Shore*, and Yan Geling’s novel *The Young Girl Little Fish*, and *The Infinite Mirror* by Chen Qian. In terms of literary creation, they show a concern for realism,

a tendency to innovate in artistic expression, an emphasis on symbolism, a tendency to adopt both a large number of overseas images and exotic stories that fit the characteristics of the times in writing. To put them into their writing, these works represent a portrait of multi-cultural integration.

Among the group of Chinese literary writers, most of them have been influenced by Western thought and culture. On the positive side, "other mountains and soils also nurture people," and the fragrant words of flowers and birds enter their poems. On the negative side, there are also Chinese writers who are obsessed with Western centrism and even follow the trend to cater to Western vulgarity. On the whole, flaws do not hide their virtues. The majority of writers still draw positive energy from Western values.

The Construction of a Spiritual Home

In the age of information technology where differences are gradually being bridged, human beings are experiencing the "walking" state of migration, re-migration and even multiple migrations. The concept of "home" is gradually shifting from unity to diversity with the principle of geographical transformation and multi-ethnic coexistence, and brings together the most complex human experiences. Moreover, when the finiteness of the external local world is leveled one by one, the inner cultivation experience and the improvement of intellectual wisdom will also remedy the deficiencies, rectify flaws and form various bright spots of existence. The new "home consciousness" of overseas Chinese writers has shown remarkable achievements in this regard.

The new "spiritual home" is obviously not marked by national boundaries, but by the exploration of the harmonious development of human beings. The harmony and coexistence between human beings and nature, society, others, and different cultures are the basic criterion and value to pursue. Writers write about the good and evil of human nature, the darkness and brightness of a society, the vicissitudes of the world, the internal grief of civilization, and of course, the aspirations for tomorrow and the future. There are many such works, such as Yan Geling's novels *The Lost Daughter of Happiness* and *Human World*, Zhang Ling's novels *Gold Mountain Blues* and *Laoyan*, Chen He's novels *Red, White and Black* and *City in the Black and White Film*, Shaojun's series of online novels *Confessions of Life*, and Mahua writer Lai Zishu's collection of micro-fiction *The Rest of Life*, and so on. The warm love between the lines and the spiritual realm expanded in them is so fascinating. With the inner descriptions and flow of consciousness of the writers' characters, readers can find a place to rest their souls through entering a

warm space and time propped up by “home.”

Specifically, in the various texts of overseas Chinese literature, the “original” and “new ecology” of the “home” can be found in reality. On the one hand, it presents unreservedly the nostalgia for the “native home” and the compassionate moral sentiment, including the various forms of the traditional “home consciousness” such as serious human inquiry and firm self-redemption; on the other hand, it is a metaphor for the modern trend of continuous integration of living individuals under the influence of multiple cultures, and its constructive movement is precisely the great project of “cultural home” and “spiritual home” toward benign globalization; but whether it is the former or the latter, the similar psychological demands repeatedly expressed in their different literary expressions make “home consciousness” not only inherit the existing cultural meaning, but also absorb new realistic discourse, thus enriching itself with a spiritual meaning beyond the mundane. The individual self and all of us flourish in their world of works, which is a kind of “poetic dwelling” and “spiritual cultivation,” providing a directional coordinate for the construction of globalized “home,” or it can be called the aesthetic world without borders (Wu 42-43).

In general, overseas Chinese literature has developed a basic trend in the past century, which reveals the “dialectical relationship” between the “native home” and the “foreign land” (Jiang Shuzhuo 102-103). Therefore, introducing “home consciousness” into the discourse criticism of “literariness” can help refine a series of new concepts of overseas Chinese literature and build a new literary theory with cross-ethnicity, cross-region and cross-culture. Home, country, and world are all the same. Rooted in a dream of hometown, aspiring to a new residence in a different place and a new home of multi-cultural harmony, it should become a paving stone for “the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind” (Xi 1). If you may ask where home is? Home is far away.

Work Cited

- 戴兆国、韩旭：“人类命运共同体：思想资源与时代意义，”《华东师范大学学报（哲学社会科学版）》4（2019）：55-60+186。
- [Dai, Zhaoquo, and Han, Xu. “Intellectual Resources and Contemporary Significance of ‘a Community of Shared Future for Mankind’.” *Journal of East China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, no. 4, 2019, pp. 55-60+186.]
- 冯宪光等：《当代西方文学思潮辨析》。北京：高等教育出版社，2015年。
- [Feng, Xianguang, et al. *Analysis of Contemporary Western Literary Trend of Thought*. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2015.]

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

黄寿祺、张善文：《周易译注》。北京：中华书局，2016年。

[Huang, Shouqi, and Zhang, Shanwen. *I Ching (An Annotated Version)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2016.]

江少川：“全球化语境中‘离散’与家园写作的当代思考，”《华文文学》1（2019）：113-118。

[Jiang, Shaochun. "'Dispersal' in a Globalized Context and Contemporary Thoughts on Homeland Writing." *Literatures in Chinese*, no. 1, 2019, pp. 113-118.]

蒋述卓：“海外华文文学与本土经验，”《中国文学批评》4（2019）：102-108。

[Jiang, Shuzhuo. "Overseas Chinese Literature and Local Experience." *Chinese Journal of Literary Criticism*, no. 4, 2019, pp. 102-108.]

倪文尖：“文本、语境与社会史视野，”《文学评论》5（2020）：46-50。

[Ni, Wenjian. "Text, Context and the Perspective of Social History." *Literary Review*, no. 5, 2020, pp. 46-50.]

吴晓东：“释放‘文学性’的活力——再论‘社会史视野下的中国现当代文学研究’，”《文学评论》5（2020）：42-46。

[Wu, Xiaodong. "Releasing the Vitality of 'Literariness': Further Discussion on 'Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature in the Perspective of Social History'." *Literary Review*, no. 5, 2020, pp. 42-46.]

习近平：“决胜全面建成小康社会，夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告，”《人民日报》2017-10-18（1）。

[Xi, Jinping. "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—Report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China." *People's Daily*, 18 Oct. 2017, ed.: 1.]