

The Identity of 'the Other' in *Gold Mountain Blue* from the Perspective of Post-colonialism

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Abstract. Zhang Ling is one of the new immigrant authors in China. The experience of living overseas and working as a hearing therapist gives her a profound understanding of Eastern and Western culture, which sets her apart from other immigrant writers. *Gold Mountain Blue*, published in 2009, describes the story of the fifth-generation immigrants from the Fang family and their survival situation in a foreign land, as well as their quest for identity. Using postcolonial theory and the methodology of close reading, this article takes several generations of Chinese immigrants in this novel as examples. Faced with unequal treatment from Western people, some Chinese immigrants find themselves marginalized and labeled as "the Other" in Western society, especially Chinese women who suffer from oppression based on both race and gender. Meanwhile, in the process of being othered, immigrants experience confusion about their identities. Based on the research above, this article proposes a new strategy for third-world groups to combat oppression from Western mainstream society, which includes fostering equal dialogue between cultures and embracing a sense of hybrid cultural identity. Furthermore, the author encourages minorities to reflect on their identities as well.

Keywords: Zhang Ling; Chinese literature; post-colonialism.

1. Introduction

Post-colonialism originated in the 1970s after the colonial period, critiquing the colonial history and imperialist practices of Western countries. The post-structuralist school, represented by Said, Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, is the most influential in this theory. They all argue that third-world countries are excluded by Western countries and play "the Other" role in this relationship. The conception of "the Other" is relative to "the Self", which refers to anyone and anything outside the existence of the self and implicates the meaning of edge and subordination as well. In postcolonial criticism, "the Other" means the weak side in the power relationship. "The Orient and the feminine are secondary to the identity and existence and subordinate to the subject." [1]. In the process of oppression, "the Other" generates thoughts about themselves.

The background of *Gold Mountain Blue* starts at the Opium Wars in the late Qing Dynasty. In order to raise a family or become rich, thousands of Chinese workers came to South America by ferry and joined in the construction of the railway. This novel focuses on the Fang family's survival experiences in a foreign society and reflects the common problems which are faced by generations of Chinese immigrant communities.

Previous studies on this novel were concentrated on family, or historical and spatial narrative. Besides, some scholars focused on the Chinese workers and interracial love in this novel. Based on previous research, this article uses textual analysis and post-colonialism theory, analyzing the different identity crises faced by generations of immigrant groups and the plight of immigrant Chinese women in this novel. At the end of this article, the resistance strategies of "the Other" are analyzed from a third spatial perspective to provide new routes for minority groups to compete for speaking rights.

2. The Other's Identity Dilemma

Said suggests that “the orient” is a Western fiction, one of the most frequent images of “the Other” in Europe [2]. In Western society, the Chinese immigrant is “the Other” in the Caucasian's mind, who are always subject to unequal treatment due to racial issues. At the same time, facing the impact of heterogeneous cultures, the Chinese immigrants have a sense of pain and helplessness when they lose their own cultures. In the process of being marginalized, the Chinese immigrants face some problems, such as existential dilemma, cultural conflicts, and failure to gain acceptance. European colonizers view disadvantaged cultures from a position of condescension and continuously marginalize them.

2.1. First-generation immigrants——existential dilemma

The first-generation immigrants left their home country to escape from the war or raise their families. However, with the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act, they felt anxious about their rootless life and guilty about their families.

In this novel, Chinese workers participated in construction which was one of the most dangerous sections of the Pacific Railway. They carried debris by hand and were even forced to sacrifice themselves to excavate tunnels. Besides, the construction team only served potatoes or white porridge for them. At the end of construction, without supplies, they had to drink rice soup to ease their hunger. If they were still starving, snow was the only food. However, “the general labor is paid only one yuan and seventy-five cents as their daily wage” [3]. Western society treats Chinese as cheap labor. These Chinese immigrants not only can not obtain satisfactory living conditions, but also lose their basic human rights. After finishing construction, the Chinese workers did not receive contractual severance payments, and their names have been erased from the news in all the major newspapers as well. As the subjects of Western society, Western people have the initiative and are more powerful than people from ethnic minorities. Under their high voice, third-world groups are denied the opportunity to express their individual thoughts, becoming the silent “other”.

In the eyes of the West, the Chinese belong to the colonized and inferior nation, who do not have a sense of self. “The Other” as an object is often treated differently by the subject. Fang Defa, the protagonist in this novel, opened a laundry shop in Chinatown, but his business had been destroyed several times by the West. The worker A Lin in this laundry shop was falsely accused by a foreigner of stealing clothes and taken to court. Nevertheless, the judge disregarded the justice of the law by catering to the West and looking down on the orient. Instead of that, due to the West's deliberate distortion of Chinese merchants into a treacherous and evil image, Acheng's business of a grocery store became increasingly cold. Degradation and marginalization of the Chinese community “are beneficial for European colonizers to establish their image, concept, humanity and experience in contrast to the East” [2].

All kinds of inequalities reflect that in a social system that is centered on “whitecentrism”, highly vocal people maintain their dominance by suppressing minority groups. Minorities do not have the right to express themselves and vote for the right, being isolated from western society.

2.2. Second-generation immigrants——culture conflicts

Immigrants usually bring well-established linguistic and cultural concepts from their home countries. Therefore, when they enter a foreign country, they may face cultural conflicts. Take the different attitudes of two generations of immigrants towards “braids” in this novel as an example.

First-generation immigrants have always believed that their roots are in China and that Gold Mountain is just a place for them to work. They do not desire or identify with a heterogeneous culture. Because of the existential dilemma, keeping the home culture can bring them security. In the view of the West, the braid was funny and stupid, but the people of the Qing Dynasty who traveled across the ocean regarded the braid as a symbol of their cultural recognition. There is a scene in this novel: a large number of Chinese gathered at the wharf to greet Li Hungchang. Both wealthy merchants and

ordinary laborers all retained their braids. This phenomenon demonstrates instead of pandering to Western culture, despite discrimination.

For some second-generation immigrants, they are unwilling to be deprived of their cultural identities in order to cater for Western society, so they begin to generate anxiety in the process of cultural disconnection. When Fang Jingshan came to Gold Mountain, he began to think about the destiny of the nation and emerged with ideals of national salvation and survival. He was involved in the Revolutionary Party's oratorical meetings, but when his braid was cut off, a strongly fear gripped him. "Make me crippled and blind. Give my braid back to me" [3]. He did not have the courage to face his father because the "braid" is a symbol of national characteristics in his father's mind. Cutting off braid means losing his father's face, and even representing missing his own cultural self-perception.

His performance in the face of cutting off "braid" reflects the pain and anxiety faced by second-generation immigrants in the midst of cultural conflict. In Western mainstream culture, the Chinese, who belong to disparate cultures, have become "the Other". In order to integrate into Western society, they will inevitably face cross-cultural frictions and fall into an identity crisis.

2.3. Commonalities between two generations of immigrants - the racial divide

Whether life obstacles or cultural divides, behind them lies a reflection of deeper racial issues.

Westerners consider that the yellow race is a minority in white society, who is colonized people. In nineteenth-century English and American literature, it is not uncommon to find many images of Asians distorted under the lens of "Orientalism". "The Chinese are portrayed as eccentric and incomprehensible people, and even the uneducable heathen. Chinatown was thus seen as dirty and filthy" [4].

In fact, Chinese immigrants have always struggled to gain acceptance in Western society. In this novel, in the late nineteenth century, the Chinese workers of the Fang Defa generation were involved in the construction of the railroad and breached the most dangerous section. During the Second World War, Chinese people, represented by Fang Jinhe, volunteered to participate in the war in the name of Canada and contributed to world peace. Both Chinese workers and anti-fascist fighters demonstrate the spirit of hard work and sacrifice, thus challenging the long-standing image of Chinese as weak in the eyes of Westerners and deconstructing the "Orientalist" vision.

After the World War II period, the longstanding contributions of the Chinese became more visible to a wider audience, but the racial consciousness of the immigrant country roots still prevented them from gaining a true recognition. In the novel, Fang Jinhe joined the ranks of the anti-fascist fighters not only to fight for the so-called freedom but also to gain approval from white society in this way. After the war, when his brother Fang Jinshan entered the cinema, he was stopped by the doorman and told to enter through another narrow door. When he informed the doorman that his brother was an anti-fascist fighter, the doorman "changed to a gentle smile on his face" [3] and let him go through the front door. This incident illustrates that if his brother had not been a soldier, he would have been treated differently from whites. It reflects the reality that despite the efforts made by the Chinese to gain recognition from whites, the vision of racial equality remains distant, and the Chinese still face prejudice in western countries and grapple with questions about their identity.

3. The Female Other

The unique identities and characteristics of Third World women have long been ignored by scholars. If presented, it is often a distortion of the female discourse [5]. In a male-dominated society, women are considered "the Other" in relation to men. Similarly, in foreign societies, the Chinese are often seen as "the Other". Consequently, women who find themselves on the margins of foreign societies face deeper identity issues than Chinese men.

3.1. Women in a patriarchal society

Spivak, in his article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* suggests that women's mindsets have been molded by the perpetuation of the patriarchal system, and their voices have been silenced[6]. Mai, the mother-in-law in the novel, epitomizes the traditional Chinese woman in a patriarchal society. They have long been imbued with a sense of masculinity. As a result, they identify with male values from the inside out and lose the sense of womanhood, even inheriting male oppression of women. She presents an internalized male chauvinism mindset in her relationship with Liu Zhi.

Unlike the other women in the blockhouse, Liu Zhi could read, write, and paint but was ostracized for having one more finger than the others. In Mai's opinion, Liu Zhi's physical defect would bring bad luck to the family, so she did not allow the marriage between her son and Liu Zhi. In order to obtain approval, Liu Zhi cut off her finger in pain. This extreme self-mutilation behavior shows that Liu Zhi was subjected to both physical and mental oppression under traditional social thinking. She was forced to damage her own body to conform to the traditional ideas of a patriarchal society. Besides, after Liu Zhi was kidnapped and ransomed by bandits, Mai believed that she lost her virginity and wanted to drive her away from the family. In traditional society, men have absolute control over gender relations. Measuring female fidelity through virginity is actually a reflection of male assertion of personal dominance. Therefore, Mai's behavior, which judges Liu Zhi through a male's perspective, deprives the women right to defend and resist for themselves. It's also an expression of male chauvinism.

3.2. Women under the double oppression of gender and race

Women from the Third World are oppressed by both patriarchy and imperialism and gradually become the “other” among subjects and objects [7]. In a foreign country, female immigrants experience life differently from male immigrants. They are not only oppressed in a male-dominated society but also have to accept the reality of non-acceptance in a foreign society.

As a second-generation immigrant, Fang Yanling grew up in a foreign country desiring integration into Western society. However, her Chinese identity subjected her to prejudice by whites. She fell in love with Johnny, a white man. Both Johnny's attitude towards Yan and the scrutiny of others reflect the disadvantaged position of Asian women in white society.

In the field of gender relationships, men hold a dominant position. Yanling wanted to depend on males, but men's contempt for love prevented her from getting marriage and finding happiness. Yan was merely a plaything for Johnny. Because Johnny worked as a singer in a pub and attract women every day, and Yanling was just one of them. After leaving Johnny, Fang Yanling spent her lifetime searching for different white males. The white male is a “savior” in her mind, and marrying a white male seems like a way out of ostracization. However, she can not escape the fate of abandonment everytime.

In the field of social relationships, Johnny always lied when he introduced Yan, claiming she was the child of a Frenchman and a Vietnamese. This reflects the social exclusion of Asians. To please Johnny, Yan attempted to alter her appearance, dressing like a Frenchwoman. In her endeavor to gain favor with white males, she hid her Asian appearance, losing self-awareness completely. Furthermore, people in town were unwilling to rent to Yanling and Johnny. They considered that an Asian woman walking with a white man was for sexual trade, which would damage their town's reputation.

Yan's experience illustrates that Asian people are not accepted as minorities in foreign societies. Meanwhile, Asian women face oppression from males and racial societies. Their personalities are tarnished, and their images are misinterpreted. They are doubly marginalized, experiencing a deeper denial of ethnic identity than Chinese men.

4. Resistance of the Other

With the development of the current world, new immigrant writers start to see cultural differences in a more objective perspective. They are “unwilling to become entangled in ‘either/or’ choices of cultural belonging and make effort to move away from the cultural marginalisation of ‘neither/nor’” [8]. Instead of writing the oppressed Chinese community in a foreign society, Zhang Ling tries to break the cultural opposition duality and create the possibility of equal communication for “the Other”, thus breaking the long-standing impression of cultural dichotomy in Chinese literature. This is in line with Homi Bhabha's theory of “Hybridity” and “Third space”.

4.1. The Equal Communication Between Cultures

In the novel, the Indian maiden Sang Dansi fell in love with Fang Jinshan and dreamed they could get married. However, Fang Jinshan refused Sang Dansi and said, “Our family will not accept you”, which was the same thing Sang Dansi's grandfather said when he left Sang Dansi's grandmother. In white society, Chinese as an ethnic minority is excluded, but when confronted with other ethnic minorities, they can not ignore racial differences. Several years later, Fang Jinshan missed this love relationship with Sang Dansi and wrote a letter to her. They finally got together again. Sang Dansi introduced her family and her grandson to, who had Chinese ancestry, to Fang Jinshan. At the final parting, she asked Fang Jinshan if he would like to date her. This gathering can be seen as an equal communication between different races. They keep their own identities and accept other cultures as well, which is an expression of harmonious coexistence between cultures.

4.2. The Acknowledge of Mixed Identity

In the novel, Amy, who is of mixed race, represents the new generation of the Chinese community. Her resistance to the identity of “the Other” and quest for self-identity is a reflection of Homi Bhabha's idea. Homi Bhabha transcends the dichotomous notions of previous postcolonial scholars. He suggests that there must be a “third space” between the two cultures. He thought that this space is “neither this nor that (I or the Other), but something outside of it” [9]. In this space, the relationship between different cultures is constantly negotiated and confronted to establish each other's subjectivity.

Amy was raised in white culture. Her mother, Fang Yanling, taught Amy, “You are not Chinese” since childhood because of her own experience. She hoped Amy could leave the Chinese scene forever and marry a white male. Under her mother's guidance, Amy neglected her Chinese status and never knew any information about her Chinese family. Therefore, when she came back to China to deal with some affairs on behalf of her mother, she felt bored and impatient at first. However, she was impressed by the story of her grandma and grandpa, which showed that love can cross the ocean. In the end, Amy became interested in China. She teared up and said, “Grandma, you can see grandpa in Gold Mountain now” [3]. She was moved by her family's history and decided to hold her marriage in China, which shows that she understand with her Chinese status.

Homi Bhabha describes mixed-race people as the interior other in minority communities. They can not integrate into the nation or state in which they live, but “they fundamentally alter the composition of the nation, blurring ethnic boundaries” [10]. It can be thought that Amy's particular “hybrid” identity is itself a deconstruction of cultural binaries. While this backing home experience forms her acknowledgment of mixed identity, Amy examines home and foreign cultures from a bystander's objective perspective. She no longer insists on the conflicts between different cultures but actively involves herself in cultural consultation and dialogue, trying to find and construct her own sense of personal identification in the “third space” of multicultural coexistence.

5. Conclusion

This novel presents the image of various types of “the Others,” who are marginalized in a heterogeneous cultural context. In a heterogeneous society, different immigrants are unable to gain

acceptance under the impact of various social dilemmas such as race, culture, gender, etc., and are thus caught in an identity dilemma. This article analyzes the novel using theories related to post-colonialism, in which the analysis of the female other contributes to a deeper knowledge of the plight of the third-world female community. Meanwhile, the article provides a new routine for the third-world group to combat oppression from Western mainstream society. "The Other" is a common character in Zhang Ling's novels. The narrative of "The Other" is not comprehensive enough in this article; for example, Henderson and his wife, Sang Dansi. Hoping that in future research, it can be more complete. In today's world, with increasingly frequent cultural exchanges, more and more people are trying to dig out the commonalities between civilizations, in addition to discovering the clashes between different civilizations. For contemporary immigrant writers, new immigrant writers, represented by Zhang Ling, open up new paths for future immigrant literary creation. Contemporary immigrant writers need to see the problem of "the other" from a dual perspective of East and West and find the commonalities between civilizations. Only through mutual respect and equal dialogue can we jointly advance the development of the world.

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