

Stance, Confusion, Listening: On the Literary Imagination of Contemporary Hezhou Poets

Hui Zhang^{1,a,*},

¹Hezhou Vocational College, Department of Literature, No. 58 Cheng xi Road, Hezhou City, Guangxi, 542800, China

a.huihui_11_12@yahoo.com

***Corresponding Author**

Abstract: Women, within their cultural environment, need to draw upon both external and internal forces to achieve self-identification. Poets, in particular, are adept at discovering issues within their hearts. Nostalgia is a conscious intervention by poets in historical culture, and through it, they engage in genuine dialogue and literary imagination with poetry, literature, culture, and life from all ages and corners of the world. The contemporary female poets of Hezhou are a group of respectable singers. Their literary stance begins with their return to their hometown, focusing on displaying historical and cultural perspectives through scenes, analyzing their spiritual perplexities, and listening to their inner voices to express women's experiences. They return to the literary scene through poetry and attempt to reveal the significance of the impact of mainstream culture on marginal culture, engaging in literary expression and feminine writing in the performance of nostalgia.

Keywords: poets in Hezhou, point of view, spiritual perplexity, careful listening, literary presentation

1. Introduction

Hezhou is strategically located at the throat of the Xiaohe Ancient Road, serving as an important pass for ancient Zhongzhou to enter Lingnan. It has been a place of outstanding talents and beautiful landscapes since ancient times, with many poems by Tang Dynasty poets that have various intersections with Hezhou. Liu Zongyuan's "Farewell to My Cousin Zongyi" contains the lines "The malaria of the Gui Mountain comes with clouds like ink, the spring of Dongting ends with water like the sky," which was written when the poet bid farewell to his cousin Liu Zongyi. It is a work of sorrowful parting, showing both the affection between brothers and the poet's indignation and sorrow for being exiled to the southern wilderness for participating in the "Yongzhen Reform." Li Shangyin's "Zhaojun" has the lines "The Gui River comes to spring early, and the sun of Zhaochuan is directly in the west," reflecting the poet's view of the early spring scenery of Hezhou. Song Zhiwen's "Down the Guijiang Longmu Beach" has the lines "At dusk, I cast myself into the Cangwu County, sleeping on a pillow of sorrowful white clouds," describing the scenery of Guijiang and the poet's worried mood. Regarding poetry, the "Great Preface to the Book of Songs" defines poetry as "the place where the will goes," believing that poetry exists for "expressing the will," emphasizing that poetry entrusts the inner emotions of people. The important thing for a poet is to discover the problems in their heart and to have a real dialogue with the poetry, literature, culture, and life from ancient and modern times and around the world. Hezhou has a profound historical and cultural sentiment, and the poetic charm and gentle beauty of Hezhou have also given birth to the literary journey of contemporary female writers and poets from Hezhou such as Jichen (Jiang Yueying), Lin Hong, Xiao Jing, Yang Jianhua, Yu Jiayu, Shiyu (Yang Meiying), Luo Xiaoling, Bosi (Peng Sihui), Chen Xiaoyang, Chen Dandizi, Ye Keke, Tao Yaojuan, and Yuan Yue (Lu Lanfeng).

2. Literary Stance: Starting from Arriving at Hometown

The 1980s were undoubtedly the golden age of contemporary Chinese poetry, "which, based in university campuses, provided an ideal literary social platform for poets with surging passion" [1]. The aforementioned contemporary female writers and poets from Hezhou, most of whom have received good education, are perceived as sensitive, talented, and ambitious. They have a high starting point for writing

and reading. In the third issue of 2016, "Hezhou Literature" featured a group of poems by three female poets: Yu Jiayu, Shiyu (Yang Meiyang), and Luo Xiaoling, whose female writing is filled with the warm sentiments of their hometown. It provided the author with a quiet and wonderful reading experience. Through the warm narrative of their hometown, their writing reflects the free spirit of literature and the emotional significance of humanity. These group poems freely soar and traverse the "back of time" in their hometown, carrying all the literary imaginations from the countryside, from ancient towns, and from inner experiences.

2.1. Yu Jiayu's "Spring" and Other Works

Yu Jiayu, a poet born in the 1980s, is an alumna of the fourth session of Lu Xun Literature Institute. Her works have been published in journals such as "Stars," "Guangxi Literature," and "Southern Literature." Her poems have been selected for the fourth and fifth biennial poetry exhibitions of "Guangxi Literature," the "Anhui Literature Annual Poetry Selection," and the "Female Poet Poetry Selection," among other anthologies.

I appreciate Yu Jiayu's poem "Ode to Spring": "This poem writes about spring / and sprouts, grows green leaves / and blossoms with pale yellow flowers." At this moment, the poet's heart harbors a smart "poetic heart," and we see the "individual" and "I" among all beings. At this time, the "poet" is "I," and "spring" signifies the start of dreams, with the warm support from the hometown, just like the young girl Li Qingzhao with a "heart of clear wind and bright moon." The poet leans on the spring breeze, with a clean and clear heart, "facing the sea, with spring blossoms." Yu Jiayu's "spring" is a metaphor, the poet has a faint hope hidden in the heart in the predicament, harboring a beautiful dream for ordinary life, which provides a model for us to understand the motivation of women responding to the pressure and dreams of life in the form of literature. Therefore, her poetry speaks, bright, soft, clear, full of the impulse to sing. "Don't disturb the birds sleeping in the stamens / and don't let the spring breeze turn on the river," this joyful mood is the true portrayal of the poet's free and easy feelings.

The same "post-80s" scholar poet Luo Yu's "April, I salvage my hometown in the willow catkins of Beijing," expresses the poet's longing for the "hollow man" in the "other place" of the hometown. People are in other places, but they have a different state of existence and sorrowful feelings from the hometown: "This is April / I walk through the whole city of Beijing along the dried memory / the misty rain forgot / the way back / the catkins rise and fall / directing the prologue and finale of life / the tears of the sky send out an empty call / a northern sound / a southern sound." The poet can only "salvage the shadow of the hometown in the willow catkins of Beijing" with melancholy at this time. Facing the south and the hometown, what the poet builds in the heart is "self-imprisonment" and "self-escape," which all comes from a sense of survival anxiety and alienation and drifting away from the hometown. Therefore, Luo Yu's poetry provides a special model for women's anxiety and activities, while Yu Jiayu finds a way to speak in the quiet and plain life of her hometown Hezhou. The inner pressure and living space they carry are different, but the hometown is always the place where the poet's soul is placed and settled. In all the literary imagination of the hometown, no matter "return" or "escape," all kinds of images about the hometown, every grass and tree, every grain of sand, can find some connection and reference in the poet's self-expression and literary expression. So, Luo Yu can continuously "place the memory of the hometown in the sunset and moonlight of the alien land" on the streets of Beijing, and the poet is not stingy with tearing and presenting her bloody wounds again and again, her heart is fragile and strong, so her poetry is more self, more tense, heart-wrenching and hard to breathe, almost completely placing the "individual" and "I" in the public space and private space and can be freely transformed. But Yu Jiayu just quietly guards the hometown, seemingly unable to find a tension with a unique personality between repression and breakthrough, her "spring" may just be a "spring" of a little girl. Her "Hand Over," is also just a little girl's ordinary thoughts and insights: "After the beginning of spring, peach blossoms hand over the buds of love to spring / the sky hands over the rain / the earth hands over feathers," so in the end, the poet shouted out, "What I can hand over, besides silence / is nothingness," this sense of powerlessness is more a kind of small helplessness and small sadness. She is like an ordinary but tenacious little flower growing by the roadside in spring, quietly waiting for the flowers to bloom, more is self-talk. But we can feel the warmth in the poet's heart, as well as her contentment with life, gratitude to the

hometown, sophistication of human feelings, and expectations for all the good things in life. This is the spark of the poet's hometown sentiment naturally scattered in the countryside, warm and fresh.

2.2. The Imagery of "Wall" in Shi Yu's Poetry and Huang Fang's "Spiritual Arrival"

Shi Yu has always been searching for an expressive way that is closest to her own personality. In "Wall," Shi Yu describes a dialogue between "I" and "the wall": "I want to write about that wall / it stands there / imprisoned by a kind of white / no sorrow, even when it hears crying / no joy, even when it sees rats getting married / sometimes, the sun will come in and touch it / the wind will come in and pat it / insects will hit it with their heads / I often stare at it in a daze / as a static wall, it has its silence / I have my unknown." This "wall" that is "imprisoned by a kind of white" is the poet's "heart wall", and "my daze" and "the static wall" describe a slow time that has been stolen, a joint presentation of the poet's inner struggle and life experience, full of imagination. At this moment, the poet Shi Yu instantly becomes a "witch", a "fabler", and in the dynamic passing years, "fable" has become the true meaning of life. However, these fragmentary descriptions and impromptu expressions lack a climax of transition and twists and the ability to think dialectically, which prevents the poet from obtaining a more open theme, and even from forming a certain counterpoint relationship. Because, "the choice of women to use literature as a way to enter society is also related to the marginal position of literature in the social and political structure. Marginal women and marginal literature have formed a counterpoint relationship in the social structure." [2] If we must categorize Shi Yu's poetry, her poems are more similar to the poetry of the boudoir, like a mountain stream, revealing a mentality of being willing to be on the edge. For women, merely being satisfied with the discussion of trivial matters around them, "will never be able to move towards the vast and profound" [2]. The poet may need "a room of her own", but more importantly, she needs to cultivate her independent personality. How to break out of the "heart wall" that is self-defined and move towards a deeper care for people and for oneself, this is exactly the direction needed for excellent poetry writing.

Compared to Shi Yu, the poet Huang Fang's "Destined" also describes the struggle and experience of breaking through the "heart wall". We see more of the poet's bizarre imagination, as well as a repeated examination and argumentation of people's inner selves, which is a tension with a high degree. As a poet who often expresses herself with "fable-like" observation, Huang Fang pays more attention to the female experience. She not only starts from the hometown but also from the heart, so her "spiritual arrival" has a thick background color. Although this background color is tinged with desolation, it is deep, philosophical, and comforting to the spiritual level of people. "Arrive or leave / she is destined to meet the falling flowers and flowing water along the way / 'It's dark, the lights are on.' The stone by the flowing water / is destined to speak in a sudden coolness / 'It's light, the lights are out.' The butterfly on the fallen flowers / is destined to use the lightest flap of its wings / to raise the dust of the night before," so, in this almost dialogue with "God", the poet Huang Fang also moves towards a philosophical speculative height. Her "arrival" is deep, with more reflective and introspective abilities, with the "fable" of "her arrival or departure along the way / is destined to be lit and extinguished by an event of falling flowers and flowing water", completing a spiritual adventure.

But we also see Shi Yu's efforts, Shi Yu also has a spiritual adventure like Huang Fang. Her "Leaves", with the experience and perspective of a woman's growth, writes a story with temperature, about love, about mutual assistance, about constancy, about growth, about the thinking and reflection on life. It is not easy to write a poem that has a story and is worth watching. Shi Yu uses the connection between man and nature to connect the growth process of mutual assistance and love, showing the temperament of a woman. "At that time / I just learned to draw a man on a mud wall. Holding his little baby", the poet's mumbling and fragmented narration tries to extend and lengthen the arc of life. In the passage of time, everything, light and shadow, speed, memory, blood, the coming and going of life, all become quiet and beautiful.

If Yu Jiayu's poetry is a wisp of smart breeze, Shi Yu's poetry is a quiet autumn rain, and Luo Xiaoling's poetry is just a historical trajectory. Luo Xiaoling's "Deep Slope", "Great Song", "Old Man at the Temple", "The Fourth River of Xiushui", starting from the cultural imprint of the hometown, is written calmly and has a texture. Through the writing of one after another Hezhou elements and cultural symbols, Luo Xiaoling carefully guards the hometown and the spiritual home. From the ancient roads of the hometown, Yao ethnic customs, an old man, a window, a folk song, a stream, she deduces and reproduces the scenes of life and

history, trying to explore the harmonious relationship between man and nature, and between man and man. She always maintains a long love and respect for her hometown, which makes Luo Xiaoling's poetry writing have more historical narrative, with temperature, with story, and not flamboyant.

3. Spiritual Confusion: Searching for the Hometown Code

3.1. The "Ecological Conscience" in Luo Xiaoling's Poetry

Luo Xiaoling, a Yao ethnic writer born in the 1970s, is a student of the eleventh minority creative writing training class at the Lu Xun Literature Institute. Her works have been published in journals such as "Selected Prose," "Flying to the Sky," "Dali Culture," "Guangxi Literature," and "Southern Literature." She has had poems selected for the 2014 "Anhui Literature" annual poetry selection and the 2015 "Red Bean" poetry selection, and she has published a personal prose collection titled "The Purple Riverbed."

Compared to Yu Jiayu and Shi Yu, Luo Xiaoling pays more attention to the realization of "ecological conscience." For example, when writing about Xiushui in Fuchun, she says: "Water goes north/It is hard to find before reaching the heart of the village/Water is the cool and thin flowing in the air/Water sound is the cry of a flying bird passing through the camphor forest/Accompanying a few cows ruminating by the river/At that time, time was full like the swollen edge stone by the river." In the poet's eyes, the hometown is full of the sound of water, the cry of birds, and peaceful days and simple villagers. The whole poem has a strong sense of the scene and a strong imagination. "Xiushui" for Luo Xiaoling is not only a background and a reflection but also a portrayal of the poet's efforts to practice the ecological aesthetics of "people living poetically on the earth" by existentialist philosopher Heidegger. The poet starts from the geographical space and cultural symbols of the Yao village, looking for the context of Xiushui, looking for the "ecological code" of the hometown and the trajectory of historical culture. From the perspective of a Yao village daughter, she writes about Xiushui, writes about Shenpo, writes about the carved window lattice, writes about the ancient stone road, writes a story, writes a history, all pointing to the hometown, pointing to the synchronous "arrival" from the heart to the spirit, which makes her poetry full of content, simple and unadorned, and can take root. "Looking down from Xiufeng/Xiushui is a magnificent flower/Ancient birds and beasts hum the ballads that gave birth to/Whose window lattice carvings/Stone Yu, Bafang, Anfu, Shuilou/These small beasts dreaming on the ground/Falling into petals and quietly guarding the maternal roots and stems" (Luo Xiaoling "The Fourth River of Xiushui"), Flower carving, water building, small beasts, these are all passwords attached to Xiushui. They are cultural symbols, inadvertently connecting the history of the hometown in the calm. It is the pastoral poem in the poet's heart. For example, when writing about the ancient temple in Shenpo, she says: "You entrust two stone drums/Standing on the left and right of the years/Left is up, related to a poem/Right is down, related to some literati's thoughts/In the middle, 7 is countless superimposed steps" (Luo Xiaoling "Shenpo"). The deep slope of Fuchun, the ancient temple of the deep slope, with mottled memories, slowly comes to us. Luo Xiaoling's poetry makes people feel grounded and stable, with stories, warmth, and a strong sense of history.

"Flying is a woman's posture - flying with language also lets the language fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its many techniques. For hundreds of years, we have only been able to get anything by flying." [3] This is a declaration by Helene Cixous in "The Laugh of Medusa," "It promotes the repetition of images and concepts, aiming to describe a level that cannot be analyzed in any systematic and timely male logic." [2] And Luo Xiaoling also has a "flying posture," her "flying" is hidden in the slow time of the ancient town, hidden in the flowing long river of history, so there is a calm and composed "let the past hustle and bustle return to silence/Green stone steps overflow with slow time/ The shaman's narration echoes in the temple/A modern new poem is repeatedly modified." The poet's eyes are full of stories everywhere in Xiushui, and every scene has a history. Luo Xiaoling writes about the "water" of Xiushui, "clear and thin and cool," she is not only looking for meaningful people and things, but she is more concerned about making life into poetry. This original intention of looking for the hometown code is everywhere in Luo Xiaoling's poetry, which is a "mother complex" in culture. The poet sticks to the spiritual homeland in the historical remains of the Xiaohe Ancient Road, guarding the poetic heart and the hometown sentiment. She loves every tree and grass in her hometown, tries to explore the cultural code of the hometown, and enjoys wandering in the sea of ethnic culture.

3.2. Spiritual Confusion and the Home in the Distance

Lin Hong, also a "post-70s" Yao writer from Hezhou, has published novels, poems, and essays in "Writers," "Poetry Journal," "Ethnic Literature," and "Selected Prose," among others. Her female writing, along with that of Yu Jiayu, Shi Yu, and Luo Xiaoling, is deeply influenced by Tang poetry and Song lyrics. Faced with the mountains and rivers and humanistic sentiments of their hometown, their narratives all carry the spiritual confusion faced by a generation. In terms of how to get rid of spiritual confusion and find a spiritual home, the contemporary poets of Hezhou all have one thing in common: they look for the "code" of life from their hometown in order to go further and further. Yu Jiayu narrates the dilemma of "adherence" and "escape" on the "other side of time": "When I meet a stone tablet, my face is always like moss/afraid of a flash of lightning/exposing my cowardice/but I still want to thank fate/for stopping me from escaping, allowing me to practice like an ant in this world of suffering" (Yu Jiayu "On the Other Side of Time"). Luo Xiaoling does not indulge in pure nostalgia. In the singing of the epic "Great Song," the poet's "distance" has a more distinct color of "chasing dreams" and "making dreams": "The figure of chasing dreams in the mountains/awakens the sleeping elves, and the night takes off its black shirt/ the sky reopens the ancient divine intention/descending on the bonfire of the Yao Mountain/and all things are once again sprouting from the nipple of the bonfire" (Luo Xiaoling "Great Song"). This seems to build a dual paradox on the spiritual level: first, all "escapes" are to go further and further; second, "adherence" and "nostalgia" are the spiritual homes of "distance." In the "adherence" of the "marginal," the poets of Hezhou, through the narrative of the "branches and leaves" of their hometown and the "slow time overflowing from the green stone steps," are not only self-objectification but also form a corresponding relationship between "adherence" and "escape." It is a breakthrough in spiritual confusion, although this breakthrough seems somewhat powerless, but they are on the cultural edge, eager to realize self-worth and spiritual home through writing.

Lin Hong, on the other hand, considers the issue of spiritual home more from the level of individual life experience and emotional experience. Lin Hong's way of literary intervention is traditional, intellectual, casual, and scattered. Family affection, scene cherishing things, feeling life and death, and awe of fate are Lin Hong's common themes and excitement points, but the most written about is "love." An experience, an observation, a meditation, a thought, a recollection, all are related to "love":

"It is well versed in a philosophy that when desire becomes missing, the singing at this moment is worth it. It lets me know that the moment is history, the capture and cherishing of the moment, which is neglected by this era. It tells me that time will not reset."

----- Lin Hong "The Song of a Cricket"

Lin Hong is a pure poet. She can turn prose and novels into poetic "poetic" language. Under Lin Hong's pen, Hezhou's unique natural scenery is full of, the softness and lyricism of the Hejiang and Guijiang rivers, the tranquility and harmony of Gupo Mountain and Daguishan, and those light and quiet plants. She writes about plants, the souls of plants, "The golden light of the sunflower/shows a quiet warmth/ facing happiness or unhappiness/this long-standing/unwavering" (Lin Hong "Sunflower"). In Lin Hong's view, "sunflower" is the direction of happiness, the direction of all the quiet and beautiful hearts. She likes to express discovery and experience with abundance and silence, is accustomed to placing the soul in a warm place, loving relatives, loving mountain wind, loving hometown. In the small town of the hometown, the poet's "days are so slow that the night is invisible/flocks of pigeons are dozing on the tile back/I was hit by the falling leaves/so painful, the south street/someone is singing leisurely" (Lin Hong "Traces of Time"). She tries to awaken the happiness that is sleeping, her poetry is moist, delicate, indifferent, elegant, and flows slowly like a stream. These poetic languages exude breath, making people aftertaste endlessly. At the same time, the poet also has an impulse to "fly", in the poetic and affectionate entanglements of the hometown, it evokes the idea of going from the hometown to the distance. Although sometimes the "traces of time" make the poets of Hezhou powerless, the "cultural code" of the hometown still fascinates the poet, like a warm light, illuminating the darkness. It is precisely the seed of the literary dream planted in the heart that makes the poets of Hezhou strive for it and let it blossom and bear fruit.

4. Inner Listening: Heading Towards an Even Greater Distance

Compared to other types of writing, female poets are better at listening to their inner selves and often use poetry to express a state, a feminine quality, or even a female experience. This dialogue, which is either

gentle, innocent, gender-thought, or historical representation, and the narrative method of "looking for themes from the hometown," whether it is a literary expression that "fills with concrete realistic details to write about the specific confusions and repressions of a woman caught between traditional and modern roles, and professional and housewife roles" [4], or a state of self-reflection and awareness and efforts to get rid of the position of being on the edge of society and culture, I would rather believe that women writing their own stories or "others'" stories is undoubtedly an attempt to open up a pluralistic space, "to challenge old concepts and bring other possibilities outside the mainstream writing patterns, when women's writing or works about women are often overlooked" [4].

In Yu Jiayu's "Listening (Group Poems)," whether it is the description of "spring" or "time," her "listening" is directed inward, bringing the surrounding people and scenery into a certain historical scene, so her female writing unconsciously brings out a very specific life experience. For example, in "Rain Beating on the Banana Tree," there is an "interrogation" of the heart: "Standing still like a banana tree, silently answering the long night's interrogation." In "Poetry," there is a recollection of narration with an idealized longing: "I want to give it a group of horses / to break through the encirclement of life / more distant than the prairie." Perhaps her poetry's texture and value judgment do not show a pluralistic perspective, nor can they be "transformed" and "sublimated" into a universal fable, but her narrative provides us with a background that is not a historical background, entrusting certain qualities and values, with the thinking of intellectuals, true and simple. Shi Yu's "Whisper" is also a kind of self-listening of the heart: "The rain is coming / It beats the door so urgently / as if it wants to talk to people." Here, Shi Yu as a "poet" and a "woman" seems to have two different states: "adherence" and "escape." The two are both opposed and integrated, with some hardships and warm experiences to avoid, which inevitably makes people feel that this "flying" and "heading towards the distance" imagination is not profound. Luo Xiaoling's "listening" pays more attention to a kind of inner balance, as she puts the "ancient post station" of "Shenpo" into the long river of history, in order to interpret "remembering the hometown" and "keeping history" so passionately: "At this moment, I stand in your post station / listen to the sound of Shu Gongtang from far and near / listen to the voice of the sacrifice returning to ancient times / the hoof sound through eight hundred miles of clouds and moon / a primitive flute sound / is melodious in my ear again." At this time, the poet's "listening to the rain," "listening to the wind," and "listening to the history penetrated by the hoof sound" is undoubtedly the persistence of "heading towards the distance" and a flexible and worldly attitude towards life. "I" with more sensitivity and consciousness, to experience a process of looking for self-identity and spiritual homeland, and expand the belief of "heading towards a greater distance" to life and history, showing the poet's cultural vision and national feelings. However, Hezhou writers still have a long way to go in exploring the depth and breadth of local cultural resources, restoring and interpreting cultural symbols, and enhancing cultural vision and reading height.

5. Conclusion

These are a group of singers worthy of respect. Perhaps they are far from the mainstream and center of culture, but they can find solace for their souls and literary expression in the marginal mountains and villages. This is because they deeply love their hometown with their lives. Only then can their literary stance and expression start from their hometown and head towards an even greater distance.

6. References

- [1] Zeng Nianchang, *The Field of Chinese Literature—Cultural Games in the Era of Commercial Domination* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore, 2011.
- [2] Zhou Le, *The Dance of the Pen Tip: Women's Literature and Feminist Critical Strategies* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2006.
- [3] Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of Medusa* [M] / Zhang Jingyuan, *Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 1992.
- [4] Huang Shuqi, *Women's Writing: Literature, Film, and Life* [M]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang