Comparison of Features of Chinese and Western Cyberliterature[*]

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Abstract—**Attention has been increasingly paid to cyberliterature which is a newly developmental type of literature. Both Chinese and western cyberliterature has its own unique features. Comparison of these features is conducted from the following four aspects: difference of technicality, game spirit, love and imaginative novels. Through this paper people can understand the different features of Chinese and western cyberliterature more comprehensively and profoundly.**

Index Terms—**Chinese, western, feature, cyberliterature, difference**

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years internet has developed rapidly all over the whole world, not only greatly influencing the social economic life, but also strongly hammering the traditional ideology and changing the working and living way of people. Literature appeared accompanying the life of human beings, changed following the advent of humans' life on the internet and entered the time of internet to become cyberliterature.

By the end of 20th century cyberliteratue has become a new member of Chinese and western literature. Studying the developmental states and different features of cyberliterature and focusing on the technicality and innovation are the subject of literary research. (Guo, 2013).

Nowadays in a large number of monographs and articles cyberliterature is discussed and studied. Aarseth's book *Cybertext* initiated the discussion of definition and features of cyberliterature in the West. Many western scholars participated in the discussion. Domestically a great many academic institutions and scholars are engaged in the research of cyberliterature. The teachers headed by Ouyang Youquan in Central South University published the monograph *An Outline of the Network Literature* and *Professor Forum of Network Literature*, established the first research institute of cyberliterature and built the website *Research of Online Culture*.

Cyberliterature in China and the West, which has its own different unique features, will be studied in the perspective of comparative literature. The network literature in China and the West will be compared from the following aspects: difference of technicality, game spirit, love and imaginative novels.

II. COMPARISON OF THE DIFFERENT FEATURES OF CHINESE AND WESTERN CYBERLITERATURE

A. Difference of Chinese and Western Cyberliterature in Terms of Technicality

Difference of technicality of Chinese and western cyberliterature is mainly revealed in the aspect of the creation of hypertext cyberliterature. Hypertext is the earliest and representative type in English cyberliterature inspired by the creation of the electronic texts. This type of texts, influenced by the European and American poststructuralism, is the online literary experiment. The hypertext literature in the Chinese cyberliterature is created under the western influence, because it demands the online writer's good operating skill. Most of the domestic literary netizens don't have the ability and interest to be engaged in the creation of the texts, so there are few hypertext works on the Chinese internet.

The European and American cyberliterature came into being and developed in the environment of the strong electronic art. Hypertext is a concept which was put forward by the American Vanguard Literature. Compared with the traditional printed texts, hypertext in fact goes beyond the literary category and is a new media art. (Wang, 2011). The creator can adopt the technology of hypermedia and add music, pictures, animation and video to assist the literal expression. Another important feature of hypertext is the application of technology of hyperlink. Hyperlink is the widely used technique. Hypertext is displayed on a computer display with hyperlinks to other texts which the reader can immediately access. (Bolter, 1991). The hypertext pages are interconnected by hyperlinks, typically activated by a mouse click, keypress sequence or by touching the screen.

Critics of hypertext claim that it inhibits the old, linear reader experience by creating several different tracks to read on, and that this in turn contributes to a postmodernist fragmentation of worlds. (Cicconi, 2000). They do see value in its ability to present several different views on the same subject in a simple way. This echoes the arguments of 'medium theorists' like Marshall McLuhan who look at the social and psychological impacts of the media. New media can

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become so dominant in public culture that they effectively create a "paradigm shift" as people have shifted their perceptions, understanding of the world and ways of interacting with the world and each other in relation to new technologies and media. So hypertext signifies a change from linear, structured and hierarchical forms of representing and understanding the world into fractured, decentralized and changeable media based on the technological concept of hypertext links. (George, 1994).

Electronic literature first came to prominence in the 1980s, with the advancement of computing technology. The earliest electronic literatures were known as hypertext fiction and used hyperlinks to connect otherwise isolated story nodes. Eastgate Systems published many of the first hypertexts on CD-ROM, including Michael Joyce's *afternoon, a story*, which is often regarded as the first hypertext.

These texts were supplemented in the 1990s by "digital born" texts, designed specifically for the World Wide Web. At the same time, developments in multimedia software allowed authors to integrate an increasingly sophisticated multimodal range of resources into digital texts. The focus of digital texts moved away from storytelling through words alone and highlighted visual elements of the text. Text-based adventure games, also fall into this genre.

In the early 90s of last century, some American novelists attempted to put the concept of hyperlink into the creation of novels and they worked on the text experiment of hypermedia and hyperlink.

Afternoon, a story is a work of electronic literature written in 1987 by American author Michael Joyce. It was published by Eastgate Systems in 1990 and is known as the first hypertext fiction. Shortly afterwards many American professional writers were dedicated to the creation of the online text fiction. *Patchwork Girl* is a work of electronic literature by American author Shelley Jackson. It was written in Storyspace and also published by Eastgate Systems in 1995. It is often discussed along with Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, a story* as an important work of hypertext fiction.

In the contemporary English cyberliterature, there are a large number of hypertext fictions, which are included on the numerous English websites. The hypertext fictions are sold and the theoretical articles about the hypertext experiment are included on those websites. For example, hundreds of hypertext fictions created by groups of writers and individuals and some critical theoretical articles are included on the website called "Hyperizons". In America some excellent online hypertext fictions are made into CD. The creation of online hypertext fictions in Europe and America is on the increase, in accordance with the poststructuralism and the narrative concept of deconstruction, promoted by the continual development of the online computing technology.

The writers in Taiwan began to carry out the experiment and exploration of the hypertext literature very early, influenced by the western hypertext literature. The representative writers are Dai Ju, Xu Wenwei, Cao Zhilian, Li Xunxing and so on. However the number of the hypertext fictions is small. At present only Li Shunxing's novel of automatic link *Filth* can be found. In the mainland cyberliterature, there are sporadic experimental works of hypertext literature. The hypertext fiction *Midsummer Valentine* was introduced on the famous mainland online website *RongShuXia*. Five hypertext fictions were introduced on the website of Tom's Chinese literature. To date those are the comparatively formal hypertext works in the mainland, Which are XuanHuan fictions *Summon the War Locks, The Wind and Cloud, The ordinary and extraordinary, The archer's story, white night*. Currently this kind of works in Chinese cyberliterature is imitated, for example *Midsummer Valentine* imitates Rick Pryll's *Lies* in Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the aspect of plots and structure. Because the creation of hypertext needs to be supported by the high technology and at the same time readers have to be patient to read the work, so netizens and readers seldom pay attention to the hypertext fictions.

The popularity of hypertext fictions in Europe and America is on the increase, while the creation in Chinese cyberliterature is without any progress, due to the lack of creating environment of the electronic art and hypertext experiment. The only existing hypertext fictions seem to be a kind of exhibition. This is the important difference between Chinese and western cyberliterature in terms of technicality.

B. Difference of Chinese and Western Cyberliterature in Terms of Game Spirit

Cyberliterature created in the postmodern context conspicuously possesses the cultural features of postmodernism and the basic representation is its game spirit. In cyberliterature, literature is regarded not only as a serious mission, but also a kind of amusement and games. People even lay more emphasis on the fun of the works on the internet. Both of Chinese and English Cyberliterature shows the characteristic of game spirit, but the difference lies in the point that in the English cyberliterature , hypertext fiction adopts the form of game spirit, while the Chinese cyberliterature reveals the game spirit represented by the content of novels of reasonless humor. Chinese novels of reasonless humor manifest the game of the literary spirit.

Chinese online writer Li Xunhuan once used a vivid metaphor: Father of cyberliterature is the internet, and mother is the literature. English professor of University of California N.Katherine Hayles had the similar expression. She said: "The parents of cyberliterature are computer game and literary tradition." Both Chinese and western online literary critics searched for the root of father and mother of the cyberliterature. They have the same expression in terms of literary features, but as for the root of father of cyberliterature, they have the different understanding. "The computer game" said by Catherine is a technical concept, while in the expression of Li Xunhuan, internet is a spatial concept. From Catherine's expression, we can see that computer game is a constituent element of the English cyberliterature. In fact English online hypertext fictions are both literary works and online literary games which readers can take part in. The internet said by Li Xunhuan is comparatively general, referring to the cyberspace as the environment of

cyberliterature. The internet provides literature with new way of expression and space. The different technical atmosphere and cultural context on Chinese and western internet have different impact on cyberlliterature in terms of form and content.

Influenced by the postmodern trend of thought, the contemporary western literature overturns and innovates the traditional literary way of expression. The combination of revolution of the literary form and modern network technology is hypertext literature. The game spirit of English cyberliterature is represented by that of the form of hypertext literature. Hypertext is the game among the different text paths. Because most hypertext is accompanied by sound and pictures, so this kind of text is like the video games. Arthurs put forward the later concept of cypertext, when he analysed the video games. While analyzing, he put the video games with the words into the category of cyberliterature texts in the broad sense. The game spirit of English cyberliterature is represented by the combination of cyberliterature expression and the form of video games.

Compared with the western cyberliterature, Chinese cyberliterature lacks the making of video games and innovating atmosphere of literary form. So there are few hypertext works in Chinese cyberliterature. However the internet in the contemporary Chinese society possesses the feature of free discourse space, which leads to the game spirit of Chinese cyberliterature in terms of content. Chinese network community, made up of adolescents, in whom the free discourse atmosphere challenges and makes fun of the classic, exists. The postmodern elements, cultural democratic issues and free spirit of youth are shown in some Chinese online works, in which the most representative one is the novel of reasonless humor.

C.   Difference of Chinese and Western Cyber Literature in Terms of Love Novels

The love novel is the main type in Chinese and western cyberliterature. Because the chief creating force of cyberliterature is the youth, so the love writing is the material of the Chinese and western cyberliterature. However the specific types of the online love novels in China and the West are quite different.

The novel of pure love in TaiWan is noticeable and popular, which is influenced by the cyberliterature of South Korea and Japan. Currently the novel of pure love in the mainland begins to emerge, but only a few.

The novel of pure love in the West consists of cyberlove story, romance and erotic novels. The cyberlove story shows love on the internet. This kind of online love novel is the continuation of the western traditional love novels. The explicit classification originates from the mature classification system of novels of the western traditional publishing industry. Most of the western love novels are sold in the form of electronic and printed books.

Love novels are the main type of Chinese cyberliterature. Before 2000 love was ubiquitous on the Chinese internet, which made the Chinese internet entitled "the net of love". With the continuous development of cyberspace, the type of cyberliterature is diverse, but the love novel occupies a large portion. The subject is not only love, but also the thinking of individual fate and social reality through the writing of the pursuit of love and insight.

The representatives of love novels in China are Murong Xuecun's *Leave me Alone: a Novel* of *Chengdu,* Anne Babe's *Seven Years*, Ning Caishen's *Countless Intimate touches,* Li Xunhuan's *Lost in the Love between the Internet and the Reality* and Muzimei's *Diary of Muzimei*. The material of love becomes the main type of Chinese cyberliterature.

Muzimei put her personal diaries onto www.blogcn.com, one of the earliest blogging websites in China. In her diaries, she gave a detailed description of "one-night stand romance", or her sexual experience with different men. The hardcore description of sex was criticized by the netizens and the critics. The pure erotic novels can't exist in the traditional Chinese literature and can't gain the legal position on the internet. The other online love novels reveal the real living state of the young men, expressing the understanding of life and social reality. *Leave Me Alone: A Novel of Chengdu* is the representative one.

Leave Me Alone: A Novel of Chengdu is an unflinching, darkly funny take on love and life in modern China. It's the story of three young men, Chen Zhong, Li Liang and Big Head Wang, and their tragi-comic struggles to make their way in Chengdu, China's fifth most populous city. Despite their aspirations in the newly capitalist China, the trio's lives are beset by dead-end jobs, gambling debts, drinking, drugs, and whoring. The comment on a website is like this:

"This novel was the hottest one in the Chinese online forum in 2002. In a sense, it is more like a life portrait 'against love'. Love in the novel becomes the homeless tramp. Besides the lust day after day, only the broken memory of youth remains. The contemporary young men's thinking of love, affection and sex are expressed with the crushing pain. The eagerness for true love in the contemporary society shown in this novel makes people's heart broken."

The bitterness of love expressed in this work is the mutual feature of all the Chinese love novels. The loss of pure love, the indulgence of desires and the dejecting pain are the keynote of the contemporary Chinese love novels. The feature is firstly influenced by the tradition of the Chinese love novels, and is secondly closely related to the realistic environment of the Chinese contemporary society.

In addition, there is much expression of love in the Chinese online science fiction, fantasies and martial arts novels. Most of those types of online works express love under the cover of emprise. In an online prose entitled *The Expression of Love in the Way of Love*: "To express ideals in the way of love, in fact, is also a kind of ideals. Love is a kind of more specific expressing way of ideals." From those words the conspicuous feature of Chinese love novels is shown and that is pouring out the pain of love to express the thinking of society and life and the pursuit of desires.

D. Difference of Chinese and Western Cyberliterature in Terms of Imaginative Novels

In China and the West, the popular imaginative novels have a long history. The popularity of imaginative novels in contemporary Chinese and western society greatly influences the creation of online novels. Imaginative novels occupy a very large proportion in Chinese and western cyberliterature. The main types of western imaginative novels are science fiction and fantasies, while the types of Chinese online imaginative novels are science fiction and Xuanhuan novels. Science fiction once played a leading role in English cyberliterature, while the Xunhuan novels have become popular in Chinese cyberliterature since the last two years.

The difference of Chinese and western online imaginative novels lies in the creation of online science fiction, fantasies and Xuanhuan novels.

Firstly, Chinese and western science fiction develops differently. The online science fiction dominates the English cyberliterature. The popularity of English online science fiction originates from the imaginative cultural mood of the western society.

An American website entitled *Archined: Cyberfiction and Architecture*, describes like this:

"In the era of machine science fiction came into being. This kind of literature and the subsequent science fiction movies show us a futuristic society dominated by the machine. Cyberfictions, which provide us with a picture in which the world is ruled by the computing culture, poured out in the time of information, as a branch of science fiction."

From the above paragraph, we can see that cyberficiton is nearly regarded as a type of science fiction. A cyberfeminist of New Zealand had the following expression in her article named *Cyberliterature: the traveling of novels in cyberspace*:

"Up to now, cyberfiction has become the exclusive territory of the online science fiction writers, especially the male writers." It shows that science fiction once had a leading position in English cyberliterature.

Comparatively speaking, the creation of Chinese online science fiction is not as active as that of the West. In Chinese society, there is no good creating atmosphere for the literature of science fiction and people have much less interest in science fiction than in martial arts and love novels, which leads to the same situation on the internet. On the Chinese biggest literary website *Rong Shuxia*, science fiction isn't included. In the developmental history of Chinese cyberliterature, there has been no sensational masterpiece of science fiction.

Secondly, Chinese and western science fiction has different features. There are numerous types in western science fiction and any work is filled with a kind of adventurous spirit, showing the awe of the nature and religion. The whole system of *Star Wars* the Chinese audience is acquainted with is based on the Christian doctrine. In the book *The Explosive Formula of Thought* written by a French writer, the strong "scientific and religious atmosphere" exists. This makes the western science fiction possess the dual characteristics of the exploration of scientific technology and spirit. In American cyberwriter Robert P. Fitton's online science fiction work *The Awaited One*, an imaginary salvation across the galaxy is described. The protagonist is a savior and with the help of the prophet he leads the arm aided by the high technology to win the victory to save his nation. The combination of similar scientific fantasies and religious elements exists in most of English science fiction.

In comparison, Chinese online science fiction lacks the most important element that is science fiction writer's awe of nature and religion. The deeply awe is not only an element of plots, but also the soul of the creation of science fiction. The mainland science fiction writer Liu Cixin once pointed out that Chinese science fiction lacked the religious belief, which was not the religion in reality, but the awe of the scientific religion. In this kind of creating atmosphere, nature is mostly regarded as the setting and scientific technology is used as something magical in Chinese science fiction, while the realistic social struggle and emotional entanglements are described, such as Zheng Jun's *Miracle Trilogy*, in which the current Chinese social economic problems are discussed. *Tempestuous Waves* in the background that Chinese companies explore the deep ocean resources is about the fierce conflicts among the rich businessmen, scientists and extreme environmentalists, mainly describing the thinking of the economic developmental issues of the current Chinese ocean. Chinese science fiction focuses on solving problems, but the discussion of those problems is too realist and lacks imagination.

Thirdly, the important difference of Chinese and western imaginative novels lies in the disparity between Chinese Xuanhuan novels and western online fantasies. The ethnic cultural origin of Chinese online Xuanhuan novels dates back to the traditional novels of gods and demons which are represented by *Journey to the West*, *feng-shen-yan-yi* and so on.

Chinese novels of gods and demons greatly influenced the creation of online Xuanhuan fictions. In spite of mixing with the western elements of science fiction and fantasies, Chinese Xuanhuan novels still inherit the narrative pattern of traditional ones of gods and demons. *Zhu Xian* is the representative work, in which gods and demons fight against each other and eventually the supernatural justice wins. It is narrated in the traditional way. In the famous online work *Beijing War*, there is a war between Chinese and American army and of course finally the American invasion fails. The author expresses his personal opinions in regard to some current issues of Chinese society, such as Beijing sandstorm, Sino-Japanese relations, Chinese football and so on

Compared with Chinese science fiction, Chinese online Xuanhuan novels seem too vague and general. Currently Chinese Xuanhuan novels are in the free state without any principles and the handling of content and details is not good enough. Around 2003, Xuanhuan novels reached its peak and got millions of click-through rates. The achievement was amazing, while these works have simple pattern and empty content and the subjects are mostly justice, conspiracy and

love. The positive characters are almost handsome men, beautiful women and men with wealth and power. The imagination is too simple and superficial, compared with that in the western fantasies, in which the ancient cultural element and the belief of paganism are explored in detail. The first English novel published on the internet is *The Magic Life,* which is a fantasy. It describes a young accountant called James and he pursues the truth of life with the help of the magician Maximillion. It starts with a nightmare and shows the long process to pursue the existing philosophy in the magical environment, interweaving with magic, love, oriental religion and some other diverse elements. It reflects the truest psychological state of the westerners. From the structure and content, English online fantasy is more deeply. It shows the foreign culture and explores the philosophy of life and is real despite the fancy appearance. Chinese online Xuanhuan novels are filled with limitless imagination, so they look dreamy and illusionary.

Chinese and western imaginative novels are respectively represented by Xuanhuan novels and science fiction. They manifest the different style. Comprehensively speaking, Chinese online imaginative novels are in a new developmental period and there's much room for its improvement. As the most popular literary genre of the internet, both Chinese and western imaginative novels have a long way to go.

III. CONCLUSION

Chinese and western cyberliterature comes into being in the same technical environment with the different developmental states and features, influenced by the different cultural traditions and realistic contexts. The creation of Chinese and western online hypertext, the game spirit of online texts, the difference of love and imaginative novels are analyzed at great length. Chinese and western cyberliterature develops fast with a large number of subjects. Cyberliterature has the edge over the traditional one in the aspect of technology, free literary spirit and literary form. In the futuristic development, the edge will become more and more noticeable with the global expansion of the internet. The original online free spirit and convenient online publishing bring new vitality to the literature of the world and the developmental road of cyberliterature will be wider and wider.

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