

Sanmao's "The Story of the Sahara" - Exotic Writings in Travel Literature

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Abstract: The act of engaging in exotic writing holds significant value within the realm of travel literature. This suggests that culture, as observed inside a particular geographic area, is inherently intertwined with local traditions and has a discernible impact on the author's writing style as well as the readers' overall reading encounter to a certain degree. This article undertakes an analysis of Sanmao's "The Story of the Sahara" by examining the author's narrative characteristics, telepathy, and emotional expression. It further interprets the author's creative style as an exotic form of travel literature, based on the author's depiction and portrayal of local customs and the natural environment.

Keywords: Exotics, Travel literature, Sanmao, "The Story of the Sahara".

1. Introduction

The literary realm has consistently attributed a steadfast significance to the act of travel. From the genre of literary travel narratives to the evolving concept of "travel literature," this form of artistic expression has consistently centered around documenting the observations, perceptions, thoughts, and emotions of travelers. Over time, the increasing popularity of travel and the expanding range of individuals' explorations of the external world have contributed to the widening scope of this genre. There is a growing trend among artists to present their own works to the public, which has led to a need for a balanced development of the definition and features of travel literature. [1] This article explores the integration of exotic writing within the genre of travel literature, incorporating human emotions and highlighting the distinctive features of vacation destinations, such as their unique landscapes and cultures. This incorporation of regional elements is considered a key aspect in the production of travel literature. Drawing upon Sanmao's literary work titled "The Story of the Sahara," this analysis examines the utilization of terms pertaining to exotic culture and nature within the text.

At the outset of the narrative, Sanmao articulates her initial motivation for venturing into the Sahara desert as a long-standing fascination rooted in her geographical upbringing. She expresses a childhood desire to acquaint herself with the desert, and subsequently assumes the role of a traveler within her written account. Employing a lens of curiosity and exploration, she diligently observes and comprehends her surroundings, ultimately assimilating into the enigmatic terrain while remaining true to her authentic self. While the book primarily focuses on materials derived from arid environments, it is important to note that there are variations among these materials. This article undertakes a categorization of the events depicted in the Sanmao Shu, dividing them into two distinct groups for independent analysis. One aspect to consider is that Sanmao, as the "recipient" of desert culture, adopts the viewpoint of a foreign tourist to observe the local culture. In this position as an outsider, Sanmao experiences the local culture and directs attention towards the "unknown" and the act of "exploration"

in the study of occurrences inside the foreign place. The second type refers to those who are actively engaged in desert culture, namely as inhabitants of desert regions. These individuals willingly participate in many aspects of desert life, assuming a leading role and even influencing the lives of the indigenous Sahara people. In contrast to the events shown in the preceding narrative, the subsequent events exhibit a greater degree of "collision" and "integration" between the characters and their external surroundings. Through the alternating perspectives and interactions of the two characters, the text provides readers with a vivid portrayal of the vibrant experiences of residing in Sanmao and the boundless splendor of the desert.

2. Exotic Writing from the Perspective of the "Recipient"

Sanmao's position as a recipient cannot be characterized just as "passive acceptance." She has consistently exhibited a proactive approach to engaging in conversation and demonstrating a receptive disposition towards desert culture. The objective of investigating Sahara culture has not been framed as "altered" or "modified." While upholding the traditions of local folklore, she remains steadfast in her initial objectives, establishes strong connections with the local community through a warm and amicable demeanor, and consistently engages in open and equitable communication. The individual portrayed in the article shown a strong inclination towards pursuing a career in the subject of puzzles. The individuals and cultural environment associated with this field provided her with appropriate responses, to which she truly replied while maintaining a respectful attitude towards conventions. Nevertheless, several academics claim that throughout Sanmao's time in the Sahara, she had a sense of identity anxiety. [2] The primary factor contributing to this situation was the individual's immersion in a foreign cultural setting, necessitating a reciprocal acceptance of local folklore in order to accommodate her inherent sense of elitism and cultural practices. Hence, inside the text, one can observe the presence of Sanmao's interjections with psychological depictions in her conversational accounts, serving as a means for her to convey personal reflections on certain occurrences.

[3] This is a component that she does not convey to the local folks in her everyday interactions. In the narrative of "The Doll's Bride," Sanmao's initial encounter with the news of her neighbor Guka's impending marriage at the tender age of ten evoked a sense of discomfort inside her due to Guka's discerning disposition towards the groom's father. Sanmao, in her account, just expressed her belief that such behavior might be attributed to a cultural practice exclusive to the Sahrawi community. I am unable to provide a critique of this problem from an excessively subjective standpoint; thus, I shall refrain from further discussion. In my opinion, they have tendencies of being excessively meticulous on occasion. This form of literary expression not only introduces the author's subjective perspective into the objective story, but also creates a sense of detachment in the reader. In contrast to depicting the ambiance of communication, the inclusion of the reader's internal conversation in this manner is more advantageous for comprehending the shifts in Sanmao's mindset as a cultural recipient along the progression of events. Nevertheless, in alternative circumstances, she also chooses to employ verbal and nonverbal communication to convey her emotional state. In contrast to the preceding article, the current narrative serves a different purpose. It no longer aims to simply convey factual information or document psychological states. Instead, it seeks to illuminate the profound emotional transformations experienced by the individuals involved in the incident. This is achieved through meticulous portrayals that unfold through subtle and compelling events. The narrative demonstrates the author's respect for folklore as an outsider, while also inevitably expressing resistance towards certain regressive notions. The experience of being a cultural recipient also encompasses a significant emotional dimension. The individual finds herself situated inside a conflict that arises from the juxtaposition of her own cultural background and the cultural practices of others. The presence of cultural differences that cannot be assimilated is also indicative of geographical distinctions. Divergent cultural practices may exist among individuals who have undergone dissimilar educational experiences. Additionally, individuals may encounter challenges in reconciling their commitment to a romantic partner who is resistant to change, despite their inability to salvage the relationship. The whole expression of powerlessness experienced by an individual from another country is evident.

However, it is worth noting that there exists a more lighthearted aspect to this cultural distinction, shown by the practice of "Desert Bathing." The novel has a distinct and robust authorial voice. In addition to the unique bathing habits of Sahara Wei, as documented in the article, the exaggerated portrayal and narrative fluctuations of the storyline also leave a lasting impression on readers. Commencing with the causal factor, Sanmao gradually elucidates the underlying reason of the occurrence, including the means by which a chance to acquaint oneself with the bathing customs prevalent in the Sahara was obtained, as well as the personal encounter with psychological phenomena. The act of reading reveals that the depiction of the "bath-watching" event is accompanied by a portrayal of the Sahrawi terrain, which is equally remarkable in its pen and ink representation. This study meticulously documents and captures the vibrant aspects of life in the Sahara, encompassing many elements such as the architectural structure of dwellings, the cultural practices of inhabitants, linguistic patterns, and more. The culture that is pertinent to the subject matter will likewise be duly noted and

intricately interconnected. The narrative constructed in this manner presents a heightened feeling of plausibility and vividness, so engendering a greater degree of reader engagement and immersion inside the depicted scenario. Sanmao employs metaphors as a literary device to effectively depict various scenarios. The author's writing also exhibits a vibrant and charming quality, evident in phrases such as "I walk in the house one by one, like pillow bread" and "By comparison, I look like a dog's tail that grew around a big, fat dairy cow, but sadly lost color." These expressions are remarkably striking, exaggerated, and thought-provoking.

Undoubtedly, being an individual of foreign origin, Sanmao inevitably encounters "restricted zones" unintentionally. The narrative of "Dead Fruit" recounts a captivating encounter that starts with a modest prospect inside the Islamic month of Ramadan. The incident's general structure may be characterized as reasonably straightforward, but uncommon, since it involves a conflict between Sanmao and the local religious practices. In the initial stages of the chronicle of everyday existence, a plethora of depictions pertaining to the dire circumstances verging on "catastrophe" serve to introduce the concept of "Mauritanian witchcraft" as an enigmatic and perilous affliction. The utilization of many verbs and disorderly language in communication results in the accumulation of overwhelming crises, which are presented in such a condensed manner that readers are hesitant to even take a breath when perusing the text. The author effectively captures what she refers to as "realistic and authentic" by vividly portraying genuine emotions and experiences via her writing. The use of first-person narration effectively communicates sensory perceptions to the audience. Upon acquiring knowledge on the individual believed to bear the curse, as relayed by the indigenous inhabitants of the Sahara, Sanmao steadfastly maintained his stance, asserting, "This occurrence is merely fortuitous, as I do not subscribe to these superstitious beliefs." The individual experienced a sudden change in emotional state, characterized by a profound sense of coldness akin to the sensation of immersing the entire body in icy water, following the direct encounter with the Islamic sham and the subsequent removal of the mantras. The individual experienced profound astonishment in relation to the repercussions of her inadvertent acts within the context of new religious doctrines. She refrained from attributing the entirety of her suffering to a specific type of consequence, instead concluding her narrative with the statement, "The conclusion of summer heralds the commencement of the picturesque autumn in the desert." The experience concluded in a tranquil manner following a period of heightened intensity, so demonstrating the unwavering resolve of the explorer. This steadfastness has always enabled her to persist in her pursuit of unrestricted travel.

In addition to her exploration of cultural aspects, Sanmao has always exhibited curiosity in the natural environment of the Sahara Desert. The author employs language as a guiding tool, effortlessly directing the readers' attention into uncharted territories. The narrative "Desperate Land" constructs an enigmatic tale by drawing upon camping experiences. Within various settings, including wooded areas, campsites, and eerie evenings, the absence of the legendary protagonist notwithstanding, a foreboding yet intriguing ambiance permeates Sanmao's narrative. This is achieved by the portrayal of Sanmao's "bad premonition," the apprehensive sentiments expressed by his companions, and the enigmatic nature of the dialogue, characterized by ambiguous questions

and responses. The author refrained from documenting certain legends or meticulously crafting a particular ambiance. Upon perceiving the amalgamation of conjectures derived from the discourse, intertwined with progressively idiosyncratic depictions of the surroundings, an intensified sense of unease pervaded my consciousness.

Furthermore, the Sahara Desert's embrace of Sanmao, an individual from beyond its borders, might be seen as an unexpected boon bestowed upon her upon her arrival. In addition to engaging in observations and personal reflections on the culture and natural environment of the desert, Sanmao actively contributes to the local community and assumes distinct roles within the desert landscape. Nevertheless, the narrative in question does not primarily emphasize her transformations within the desert; rather, it functions as a metaphorical construct imbued with a sense of infantile significance. The convergence and coexistence of the products from two distinct civilizations and worlds are observed on this particular area, manifesting via the exquisite calligraphy of Sanmao. Mutually supportive neighborhood ties are a vital element of social dynamics within the Sanmao Desert. [4]

3. Exotic Writing from the Perspective of a “Participant”

Sanmao's records reveal that she consistently endeavored to cohabit happily with local values while simultaneously retaining her identity as a "intellectual" and adhering to her personal standards of judgment. The book highlights the distinctiveness of the desert's unspoiled environment and cultural practices. However, it is imperative to emphasize the need of promoting education, even in cases when indigenous women may not perceive a need for it. The accounts of Sanmao's experiences of "running a school" and "practising medicine" in the Sahara Desert are documented in the literary works titled "Running a School" and "Practising Medicine". [5] The article has many narratives. While the title employs commendable idiomatic expressions, the substance of the text lacks substantial information on the assistance given by the community members. Moreover, it is evident that Sanmao exerted much effort in fulfilling his responsibilities and acted spontaneously, driven by real compassion or empathy. According to the report, Sanmao is depicted as having no engagements during weekdays and subsequently establishing a tuition-free educational institution for females within her residence. The relocation has had significant effects on the women in the area, despite being motivated only by Sanmao's lack of occupation. The Saharawi women's limited understanding of physiology has been augmented by the use of Sanmao's expertise in her literary works and educational settings. Despite the birth of several infants, the process of life development remains elusive. The discussions and laughs of Sahrawi women, as shown by Sanmao, exhibit a notable degree of naivety. The individuals in question appear to lack an awareness of the constraints imposed by conventional

religious ideologies. They exhibit characteristics typical of inquiring and intellectually curious pupils. The author adeptly combines insights into production expertise and local fertility practices in a subtle manner inside her writing. She employs a straightforward rhetoric to convey the character's feelings, skillfully utilizing language and vivid descriptions to propel the narrative forward. In contrast to Sanmao's literary works produced at different periods, the personalities depicted during her sojourn in the Sahara had a remarkable degree of lucidity and depth. The aforementioned outcome was a direct result of her proactive assimilation into the arid environment, and it was further manifested in her handwritten communication with genuine authenticity. In this segment of the narrative, Sanmao's distinct personality and steadfast convictions are evident when juxtaposed with the "recipient." Despite facing opposition and criticism, she demonstrates the ability to effect changes within her sphere of influence throughout the flood. This unwavering determination is a testament to her character and her unwavering commitment to the quest of freedom.

4. Conclusion

Regardless of whether she is referred to as a "recipient" or a "participant," all individuals mentioned are crucial to Sanmao's experience in desert life. The amalgamation of emotions like as sadness and joy, as well as the contrasting states of rush and relaxation, converge to form the essence of the "heart of the desert" that she seeks. This essence may encompass unfamiliar and antiquated rituals, or a vibrant and distinctive cultural identity.[6] She experiences all of it with her authentic self. Through her artistic expression, the individual is able to perceive a growing sense of liberation and autonomy within her physical being. Employing meticulous and vibrant brushstrokes, she captures fragments of her surroundings, meticulously rendering every blade of grass and tree she encounters during her journeys. This meticulous attention to detail imbues her written works with a distinct Sahara style, evoking a profound sense of humanity for the readers.

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