

A Study of Urban Writing in My City from The Perspective of Fairy Tales

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Abstract: This paper reconstructs a different textual city from previous ones by starting from a fairy-tale perspective as well as adopting a unique artistic approach of narrative modernity. Xixi's *My City*, taking the narrative style as the starting point, by exploring the narrative subject, narrative method and narrative structure, writing light urban literature, organically integrating urban aesthetics and textual fiction, properly embodying the complexity of Hong Kong literature and expanding the readability of text, and deeply peering into the value and significance behind urban writing research.

Keywords: Fairy tale perspective, City writing, Narrative style, *My City*.

1. Introduction

The ways of writing about the city in Hong Kong literature are constantly changing and developing, and in the complex history of writing, Xixi's construction of the textual city is innovative. As a 'fairy tale novel', *My City* uses a fairy tale perspective to dissipate the heaviness of urban writing, and the intervention of the fairy tale form also imbues the text with a sense of surreality and fluidity. It is no longer just a depiction of real urban life and urban landscape, but a reflection of the meaning of urban writing. This meaning lies in the expansion of the textual space and the transformation of the urban subject. The way to achieve this meaning is through the exploration of narrative strategies and styles. Given the importance of Xixi's *My City* in the history of urban writing, this essay analyses the significance of the fairy tale novel as a new model of urban writing from the perspective of narratology.

2. Change of Narrative Subject: Adopting Children's Perspective and Writing Light Urban Literature

In the subject of city writing, the adult perspective is often the narrative subject. Against the backdrop of the pursuit of capital growth that constitutes the dominant ideology of Hong Kong society, the heaviness of the industrial age and the sense of alienation between people become the main themes of urban memory. The main subject of the city is children, and the city as seen by children is childish and caricatured, with flowers and orchards in their minds. I am the city"[1]. In *My City*, there is also a childlike account of the social context of severe environmental pollution and resource scarcity. When Yoyo goes to the art exhibition, it says "I am hungry"[2] on the oil drum and "I am thirsty"[2] on the water tap. When Ago is cleaning up the rubbish genius with his sister, the two see the rubbish as a "rubbish group" and together they go to the genius to plant flowers[2]. The city from the children's point of view has a lighter filter, which undoubtedly increases the temperature of the urban text. In addition to this, the sense of alienation between people and objects and between people is also changed in the representation of children's language. The content of the envelope is affectionately translated as a

'crossword puzzle'[2] when Ago is looking for a job, and through Ago's highly personal translation, he succeeds in evading the 'tame' relationship of power with a funny language full of expectations, bringing people closer to each other. The book opens up the urban subject by making some of the serious social problems of the city's transition period appear to be diluted in the logic of children's thinking and experiences of growing up. There are many more such childlike narratives in the book, and the descriptions of the main characters, Ago, Yoyo and Mai Happy, show a positive and optimistic spiritual undercurrent in *My City*.

3. Novel Narrative: Simulating The Form of Fairy Tales and Constructing Urban Fairy Tale Novels

In the complex history of urban writing, the novel has become the main literary narrative genre. The 'fairy tale' and the 'novel' are two artistic concepts in themselves, and the 'fairy tale novel' represents a textual composite, a modern variant of the form[3]. This novel about Hong Kong's urban literature, *My City*, is full of social phenomena, which Xixi transforms into a playful form by relying on the intervention of fairy tales, thus constructing an urban fairy tale novel. This is mainly reflected in the following aspects.

3.1. Flattening the transformation of people and places

The characters in the text do not have real titles, nor are they closely related to each other; they are close to fairy tales, flattened images, but only representations of certain characteristics. Cinderella is named after the ashes she slept in for so long that she was covered in ashes, and McHappy in "*My City*" is not happy, just as "Don't" is happy. In addition to this, Cecil also changes the names of places in the text to fit the character's identity. In constructing the fairy tale novel, the reader is given a new sense of reality and imagination, creating a space for imagination as in a fairy tale.

3.2. Transformation of fairy tale material

The character of McHappy in *My City* is similar to the Happy Prince in the fairy tale. The character McHappy loves

to help others, cutting down rules with an axe when he encounters them and carefully preserving the notebooks he finds, and in the text Cecil also refers to the Happy Prince, both characters having a giving spirit. Sisi also brings surreal elements from fairy tales into the novel, as characters are given surreal abilities, such as Bigfoot's mother being able to travel around Mars and "sending a picture of her standing with a cosmic black hole"[2]. This mutual absorption, turning fragments of each other into themes of their own, abounds in *My City*[4]. The different narrative approaches, one imaginary and one real, combine the allegorical nature of fairy tales with the realism of fiction to build a new paradigm for writing about the city.

3.3. Writing techniques close to fairy tales

Fairy tales rarely describe feelings, but more often express them by describing the actions of the characters. For example, in the narration of the story of Happy Mak, it is written that when he was riding in the lift, others did not want to sit with him, so Happy Mak's heart must have been sad and uncomprehending, but the text says "Happy Mak raised his hands and turned himself around in front of everyone to show them that he did not carry a knife, a toy gun, etc. "[2]He slams his head against the wall, which is also a reflection of his inner state, an act that is not something a real person would do, but is usually an exaggeration in fairy tales. As in the fairy tale depicting a king who is angry, it will make him become ready to explode; the king greets the dragon, but the dragon ignores him, so the king and the dragon fight[5], which is the behavioural outworking of an inner state, in the same way that Xixi's novel depicts behaviour. There are numerous other texts that can be used to illustrate the close to fairy tale technique in *My City*, and this innovative textual fiction is a kind of 'Naive' work.

4. Unique Narrative Structure: Fairy Tale Structure Reflects Urban Aesthetics

As pointed out by He Furen in 'A Way of Reading *My City*', the collage of multiple shots in Xixi's *My City* presents the aesthetics of a long scroll in the style of 'Qingming Shanghetu', with the camera constantly moving and changing the identity and position of the narrator, reading the text through the aesthetic style of the long scroll is an attempt to master the structural features of this novel[2]. This unrelatedness between narrative episodes is an important element of the fairy tale, where time and space are not continuous, and the narrative method of using a large number of collages blends the near and far shots into one. Just as the novel opens with the mention of Ago attending a funeral, the shot from attending the funeral switches again to the grassy slope on the square, which is unrelated to the waste cardboard boxes on the square, and the scene instantly switches to the village of Bataan, a series of images that switch and move to narrate the progress of the story, with the elements that make up the city being separated and thus constructed into an aesthetically rich imaginary city. This fairy-tale textual structure creates a narrative technique of simultaneous dislocation, where different urban micro-spaces are combined together at the same time to form an overarching urban space with a sense of fluidity and multi-dimensionality. In addition to this, there are

many non-episodic descriptions in the text, often based around a single object, and the author uses modern techniques such as symbolism and collage to 'morph' characters and things, for example, 'newspapers' appear repeatedly in the text, but not in the same section. For example, 'newspaper' appears repeatedly in the text, but is not in the same chapter and is not substantially related to it, yet they all imply a shortage of resources. In chapters 4 and 8, the specific object of the telephone is repeated as a medium of communication, and these real objects, which exist in the writing of the city, create a surreal space through symbolism and collage, like a fairy tale. Exploring the cultural symbolic function of 'objects' in narrative will help us to better understand the writer's intentions[6]. Whether it is the collage of shots or the non-episodic narrative of 'objects', the aesthetic realm of urban writing can be felt, and the weaving of beautiful fiction exists in the construction of the novel's fairy-tale structure.

5. Conclusion

"For a long time, cities have mostly been the setting for fictional stories. As such, fiction may contain a deeper understanding of the city. We cannot ignore its illuminating nature merely as a source for describing urban life". The novel also includes the meaning of urban writing behind it. In 1970s Hong Kong, Xixi's work emerged as a kindly exploration of the city, gently expressing his caring love for the city between words. Xixi's unique narrative strategy completes an interesting representation of Hong Kong's urban social and cultural phenomena. In comparison with previous works of urban literature, the heaviness of the city is replaced by a light and airy narrative language, focusing her concern for reality behind each and every word. The novel fairy-tale perspective is full of positive and optimistic spiritual undertones, and the jumping moving camera enchants the reader with a painting of urban aesthetics. *My City* builds a fairy-tale-like world within the work, encompassing Xixi's experience of the city's development and changes with the people of Hong Kong. To sum up, Xixi's *My City* adopts a child's perspective, removes the heaviness of the city, mimics the form of a fairy tale and uses a fairy-tale text structure to write a new picture of the aesthetics of the city. With a lively and childlike style of language and a cleverly constructed narrative, Xixi makes a statement for the city of Hong Kong.

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