

Abstract

This thesis on Zhang Chengzhi's novels consists of two parts: the first part an overview of the commentaries over a period of twenty years on the characters, style and life philosophies put forward by this author; the second part an appendix of a chronological and general textual study of his novels put down in the form of reading notes from my subjective point of view.

Commentaries on his novels flooded the eighties, somewhat subsided in the early nineties, and reemerged again in the late nineties when they reached a stage of maturity, which is also a period when such commentaries have already made considerable achievements in terms of quantity and quality. They generally reflect a close study of his work with a "from the easy to the difficult" process in revealing Zhang's world of novels. Appreciations might base upon loyal tracking and analysis of the details, or are simply impressionistic studies. There are also overviews coupled with in-depth explorations of all his works, not to mention the academic studies representative of most rigorous and comprehensive approaches.

The characters of Zhang's novels are with stark images: be they the romantic chivalries, the lonely travelers, or the heavy-hearted heroes; all are made so insightful by the author, manifesting the deep side of life: its spirituality. Further permeating from the characters are strong feelings such as those derived from the sense of motherhood so overflowing or the miseries borne by lower-class people; the characters, therefore, are mould all the more sentimental and mentally turbulent, resulting in their perseverance and unbeatable courage all the more evident against the magnificent settings of the natural sceneries.

The romantic poetic approach, the detailed depiction, the creation of multiple imageries, and the outflow of insightful meanings too "unearthly" to grasp and transcendental – all form the gist of Zhang's style, which in turn reflects his very idiosyncratic character. Coming along with his poetic and pictorial descriptions are his retrospections of life, and he uses monologues to explore where the soul should rest with finally. With the multiple imageries, meanings about life go transcendent, pounding and revolving time and again throughout the journey of the characters.

His novels are tinged with a sustained liveliness and courageous "fear no death" mindset, reflecting the core of his insights about life and death. The theme of his nature-inspired consciousness of life repeated various times and gradually becomes a kind of life philosophy so appalling, which eventually is uplifted to reach a stage of religiosity. From his perceptions, the whole picture of the disappointments and weaknesses of being a human is exposed; the hopes and strength of which are also signified – these revelations eventually get together to signal the transcendence of life and reborn.

This study on Zhang's work over two decades presents his novels as laying out a pluralistic world in front of his audience; yet this world is unified, in the sense that a revolving theme is brought about by all its characters. As for the content, there are passionate romances and melancholic sorrows alike, where both toughness and tenderness mingle. The poetic and pictorial (full-of-imagery) approach hails the good old days; the detailed descriptions filled with impulses and romances explore the dreams of the future; the colourful and bright imageries make the novels more appealing artistically, and the characters carry themselves in such a way that they can powerfully remove all obstacles in their life journey. Though courageous enough these characters seem to be, the novels themselves are still, overall speaking, told with a melancholic tone. It is through such a tone that the theme "life is supreme" is exposed before us.