

The Oriental Aesthetic Implications of “Qinling Narrative”— A Case Study of Jia Pingwa’s Novels

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Abstract: As the “dragon vein” of Chinese civilization, the Qinling Mountains embody the spiritual geography of the East. Writers who are born and raised in this region naturally carry within them a distinctively Eastern aesthetic sensibility. Jia Pingwa, who grew up near the Qinling Mountains, has in recent years made “Qinling” the focal point of his creative endeavors. His novels such as *The Old Man* (Laosheng), *Shanben*, and *Chronicles of Qinling* (Qinling Ji) construct a uniquely Eastern “Qinling chronicle” and “ethnography” within a vast narrative space informed by Oriental aesthetics. These works manifest the Eastern sensibility through their poetic, non-logical, and non-systematic features that stem from deep aesthetic contemplation.

Keywords: Qinling narrative, Oriental aesthetics, Jia Pingwa, novel

1. Introduction

Oriental aesthetics is suffused with an aura of mysticism. The interplay between the real and the illusory—“the mutual generation of void and form”—is a common creative method in Eastern aesthetic practice. Valuing the role of the “void” in artistic perception and approaching beauty through a dialectic of the substantial and the insubstantial constitutes a fundamental trait of Eastern aesthetics. In literary texts, Oriental aesthetics is constructed through the collaborative expression of language, narrative structure, visual art, color, clothing, and architecture. Taking Chinese aesthetics as an example, the philosophies of the ancient sages articulate the existence of beauty through a discourse of beauty itself. Literary forms such as parallel prose, classical essays, sketches, novels, and operas collectively become vessels of aesthetic articulation. Just as the unity of void and form in Chinese philosophy is projected into texts, so too is the realm of the real and the unreal derived from the essence of beauty long embedded in classical Chinese thought. This cultural tradition reflects the indigenous aesthetic ideal nurtured by the Chinese soil. In recent years, Jia Pingwa has focused his creative energy on portraying and narrating the Qinling Mountains. His novels *The Old Man*, *Shanben*, and *Chronicles of Qinling* take the “Qinling chronicle” as the narrative core to explore the evolution of society and history. In reconciling the tension between narrative subject and object, Jia frequently employs geographic landscapes to encompass a universal vision. By leveraging the totality of space and time and adopting a structure that unites Heaven and Earth, his works reflect spiritual temperament. Whether it is the cosmological view of the unity of Heaven and man, or the existential state of the oneness of self and environment, these all leave discernible traces within the field of Oriental aesthetics.

2. Perception: the flowing state of “flowers in a mirror, moon in the water”

In traditional Chinese culture, the relationship between presence and absence is governed by a philosophy of balance and dialectics—an emphasis on “harmonious speculation.” Laozi’s assertion that “existence is beneficial, non-existence is useful” elevates the relationship between being and non-being to a philosophical plane. Opposing pairs such as presence and absence, yin and yang, form and void, though seemingly contradictory, coexist in a dynamic of mutual dependence and transformation. In Chinese ink painting, blank space—liubai—is skillfully employed to allow viewers to conjure mountains and rivers within their minds, guided by the gradations and opacity of ink. Similarly, the black-and-white interplay in the Taiji diagram generates a perfectly harmonious aesthetic. In literature, calligraphy, music, architecture, and other tangible cultural expressions, the intangible essences—such as qi (vital energy), yin-yang, and the five elements—together form the aesthetic discipline. This logic of the mutual generation of form and void demonstrates the ethereal nature of the Oriental aesthetic system.

In Eastern painting, Chinese artistic creation adopts a unique spatial logic often referred to as “scattered perspective.” As Zheng Banqiao once emphasized in his bamboo paintings, one must observe the bamboo with the eyes, internalize it in the heart, and finally express it with the hand. Painters are not constrained by objective reality but instead freely select and arrange elements to construct their compositions. When portraying lofty mountains, artists draw from their inner imagination rather than reproducing a specific mountain in photographic detail—a practice captured in the phrase, “Draft the sketch only after exhausting the myriad peaks.” This method of perspective is, in fact, deeply tied to religious ideology, heavily influenced by Daoist cosmology. In Daoism, the “Dao” is omnipresent and infinite: “Its essence fills heaven and earth without exhaustion, its spirit encompasses the universe without end; its origin is unknowable, its boundary unknowable, its source unknowable.”[1] Although the “Dao” cannot be directly perceived, it is a real existence that must be understood through observation and reflection. The “Dao” is the intrinsic law of nature—not a supernatural deity like the Western God, but an immanent principle that seeks harmony between humanity and the natural world. Consequently, in Eastern painting, landscapes and natural scenery are mutually embedded and interpenetrative; their transformations are not confined to the viewer’s line of sight. This principle also manifests in Jia Pingwa’s literary techniques. Much like the scattered perspective of traditional painting, he constructs his characters across various narrative spaces in a seemingly disordered fashion. His characters do not enter the stage in uniform order but emerge chaotically, each brimming with vitality and vigor, rather than being rigid, repressed, or lifeless. In Jia Pingwa’s “Qinling” novels, the dynamic flow of mountains, water, dreams, and human movement permeates every scene. With just a few strokes, characters like Jing Zongxiu, Lu Juren, Kuang San, the singer, Master Kuanzhan, Mr. Chen, the benevolent man, and Li Shui come vividly to life. Jia often uses dynamic natural landscapes to reflect the vitality of human and animal life. In singing the praises of nature’s rhythm, he breathes continual momentum into his imagery. Everything is in flux, flowing like water, like mist, like wind, like rain—ceaseless and unstoppable. His characters unfurl outward from the innermost depths of their being, spreading into the narrative space like illusions in a moonlit mirror, filling the text with ethereal energy.

Whether portraying landscapes or people, Jia consistently uses movement to link the story’s beginning and end. Even in depicting stillness, he employs dynamic imagery or uses stillness to highlight motion. His narrative flows like a filmic montage, vividly portraying urban and rural life scattered across Qingfeng Street, Guofeng Town, Wo Town, and the Qinling Mountains, forming a “dynamic” historical tableau. The resulting visual effect is striking—scenes shift like illusions in a mirror or reflections on water, constantly changing, bursting forth in a frenzy only to vanish in silence. Jia Pingwa seeks to narrate through motion and transformation, through the interweaving of presence

and absence, thereby symbolically linking the Qinling Mountains with China as a whole. His novels construct a cultural imaginary of the Qinling region, sketching a vast and richly symbolic national history. Upon first encountering the title *Shanben* (The Roots of the Mountains), many readers may assume the novel focuses on the grandeur and abundance of the Qinling Mountains. However, Jia deliberately narrows his focus to the small town of Wo at the foot of the range. Like a painter contemplating his subject—first observing the large through the small, then depicting the small as a reflection of the large—Jia’s narrative perspective is fluid and omnidirectional, not fixed on a single point. This method is exemplified in his detailed description of Wo Town in *Shanben*: “The Black River flows from the north, the White River from the northeast, and they converge at the southern edge of the town. Beneath a stretch of ochre cliff lies a swirling pool.”[2] This whirlpool mirrors the circular, interpenetrating forces of yin and yang as seen in the Taiji diagram, encapsulating key elements of Eastern aesthetics such as the Five Elements (wuxing).

The fusion of China’s four seasons with the yin-yang and Five Elements systems forms a unique calendrical logic, shaping the pattern of all worldly transformations. This system profoundly influences the spatial and temporal structures of literature and art, including the organization of characters and their fates. In *Gulu* (The Ancient Kiln), Jia structures his narrative around the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—to recount the village’s Cultural Revolution history. Each season brings distinct scenery, and the cyclical narrative reflects the Eastern approach to life: introversion, endurance, tribulation, transcendence, and return. When the Cultural Revolution erupts, the character Good Man remarks: “The world has Five Elements. The nation has Five Elements. The family has Five Elements. Even sex has Five Elements. So does the mind. Things are so chaotic right now—if you ask me, the country’s Five Elements are out of order. The Five Elements of a nation are agriculture, education, commerce, industry, and governance—they’re like the heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys.”[3] Yin-yang emphasizes the dual yet interconnected forces, while the Five Elements stress systemic integration. The escalating conflict between the Red Broadsword Team led by Tianbu (the Zhu surname) and the Hammer Team led by Bacao (the Ye surname) in Gulu Village represents the broader, all-encompassing intrusion of state power. Thus, “yin-yang and the Five Elements” serve as a microcosm of the Cultural Revolution itself. Originally a peaceful mountain village known for its porcelain—“porcelain” here symbolizing China, and “Zhongshan” (Central Mountain) symbolizing the nation—Gulu becomes an allegory for China itself. The village’s history of revolution, from the initial turmoil to the execution of characters like Tianbu, Bacao, Shoudeng, and Mazihei, encapsulates the catastrophic arc of this historical trauma. As Jia reflects in the postscript of *Zanzuo* (Temporary Residence): “It becomes clear that life is a repetitive cycle of suffering, of parting and reunion, shaped by one’s good or evil deeds through the transformations of time and space.”[4] Life’s dynamism, its quietude and movement, unfold within the ever-shifting illusions of mirrored flowers and flowing water. Through this lens of cyclical history and the endless loop of life and death, Jia Pingwa’s novels reaffirm an ancient truth: all things are in flux. The world is born through change and concludes through transformation. To live in accordance with nature—Dao follows nature, heaven’s will must be obeyed—is the fundamental ethos at the heart of Eastern aesthetics.

3. Non-logical and non-systematic: the realm of the “hidden and the wondrous”

“The significance of artistic conception lies in the interplay of the real and the virtual. The real refers to mountains, rivers, plants, and the natural world; the virtual stems from the creativity of the mind, expressed through the hand. Whether the virtual can be transformed into the real depends entirely on the presence or absence of artistic language and symbolic representation, thereby constructing a realm of spiritual wonder [5].” This aesthetic system undergoes spatial transference, conveying the essence of classical Eastern aesthetics. “Hidden” (symbolism and implicitness) and “wondrous” (mystery and

strangeness), as core aesthetic attributes of the “Imagist Theory” in traditional Chinese aesthetics, are deftly woven into literary texts by poets and writers, giving rise to an endless resonance of national aesthetic imagery. Tangible imagery constructs an abstract artistic realm, producing a rich and intricate space of hidden and wondrous effects. “The category of imagery reflects the unique aesthetic pursuit of the Chinese nation—achieving harmony between humanity and nature, and a unity between subject and object—demonstrating the national style and aesthetic orientation inherent in traditional Chinese art.”[6] This is precisely because the aesthetic thinking of Eastern nations leans toward sensibility, devoid of fixed principles and rigid systems, emphasizing viewing the world through the heart and gaining enlightenment through intuition. Thus, Eastern aesthetics is essentially surreal, characterized by non-logical and non-systematic qualities. In the selection of imagery and the construction of artistic conception, it tends toward the creative transformation of primitive aesthetic thought and original art.

Jia Pingwa once said: “Lately, my creative intention has been to reflect the resonance between the human world and the cosmos, and to evoke the most moving emotional atmospheres by constructing a world of imagery beyond mere existence.”[7] In *Shan Ben* (The Book of Mountains), the rouge land of Lu Juren is recognized by a feng shui master—one who “moves the dragon vein”—as a site that can “produce officials,” a statement rooted in the ancient geomantic tradition. The art of feng shui venerates “seeking dragons, observing sands, inspecting water, locating acupoints, and determining orientation.” Sites where the energy of a dragon vein converges are believed to be highly auspicious. Just as Jing Zongxiu, whose fair and delicate appearance makes a grown man resemble a young maiden, comes to possess Lu Juren’s bridal dowry through a twist of fate, he gains the feng shui treasure land, foreshadowing his extraordinary destiny. Indeed, the rouge land, deemed a geomantic treasure, marks the beginning of Jing Zongxiu’s legendary life. From this turning point, the fates of Jing Zongxiu, Jing Zongcheng, and Ruan Tianbao diverge irrevocably. Though they all grew up in the town of Wo, some chose to stay, some left, and some fought fiercely. The trifurcation of the rouge land catalyzes a dramatic transformation in Wo Town—Qinling’s largest settlement—eventually crushed by the ravages of war and reduced to dust. The bustling prosperity of Wo Town rose from nothing, peaked, and declined, undergoing cyclical rise and fall. Countless shells rained down, razing the town to ruins. Yet Qinling remained ever lush and verdant, with distant mountains standing tall, layered in shades of deep blue. Here, feng shui and dragon vein imagery function as central narrative threads throughout the novel, interwoven with the emotional arc between Jing Zongxiu and Lu Juren, guiding the trajectory of Jing’s rise and foreshadowing the ups and downs of Wo Town. Jia Pingwa uses the mysterious and uncanny motifs of feng shui and dragon veins to unfold the people and events of Wo Town, where all cause and effect ultimately follow the path of karmic retribution. The feng shui treasure not only symbolizes Jing Zongxiu’s extraordinary life, but also reflects Jia Pingwa’s lamentation over the vicissitudes of worldly affairs.

The movement of qi refers to the dynamic forces that give rise to the myriad forms and phenomena of the universe. In Section 54 of *The Chronicles of Qinling*, Kang Shiming acquires *The Flora of Qinling*, authored by Ma Tianchi, which corresponds to the work penned by Magistrate Ma in *Shan Ben*. The book records the growth conditions and practical uses of various plants. In his depiction of vegetation, Jia Pingwa systematically categorizes the flora by name, shape, color, edibility, raw material function, ornamental value, and cultural significance. He then discusses their natural environments, from which he infers the diverse directions in which qi flows through each species. Jia remarks that “plants understand their environments better than humans.” Undoubtedly, this comparison between humans and plants reflects the author’s intent to express the ecological reality of survival of the fittest and the harmonious coexistence of all living beings. In Section 57, although Lisui is born to a blind father and a mute mother, he grows into a sharp-minded, serene, and contemplative youth. With a strong thirst for knowledge, he is capable of “gazing upward to observe

celestial patterns and looking downward to examine earthly forms.” Lisui’s reflections on the passage of time and the rise and fall of life and all things reveal his philosophical engagement with impermanence. As Hong Tongzhong writes, “Life has its time, and death its place. In truth, a person is but a breath of qi that rises from the earth—emerging from a certain point and returning to the same [8].” This conveys the idea that the movement of qi represents a cyclical law of life itself. Such a worldview, marked by its non-logical and non-systematic structure, constructs a mysterious cosmology rooted in fengshui and qi dynamics, embodying the deep-seated principles of primitive Chinese cosmological thought—that the latent vitality and flourishing of life are embedded in the growth patterns of all living things.

Jia Pingwa once said of his own work, “Zen is the transformation of the mind; Dao is the insight into nature [9].” In *Shan Ben*, the Earth Store Bodhisattva Temple serves as the dwelling of Master Kuanzhan. A wooden plaque hanging by the temple’s main hall reads: “Until all hells are empty, I vow not to become a Buddha; patient and unmoving, with deep, meditative insight.” The temple and its inscription represent Buddhist doctrine. Master Kuanzhan, a mute woman, always carries a shakuhachi (Japanese bamboo flute) with her. At the wedding of Yang Zhong and Lu Juren, she plays *Xuduó* on the shakuhachi: as the couple burns incense and bows before the ancestral tablet, she takes out a bamboo flute and begins to play. In that moment, it feels as though wind sweeps through a dense forest—ethereal, tranquil, and otherworldly melancholy fills the courtyard and envelops the heart [2]. *Xuduó* is a Zen composition, and Master Kuanzhan uses her music to cut through delusion and reach a state of emptiness. The shakuhachi appears throughout the novel as a symbol of emotional relief, mental clarity, calamity dispelling, blessing, and peace. It derives from Buddhist thought that everything arises from causes and conditions, and that all is governed by karma. Through the sound of the shakuhachi, Jia Pingwa implies that all things in the world follow the cycle of cause and effect—nothing can be forced. Mr. Chen, a doctor at the Anrentang pharmacy, helps people resolve confusion around illness, life, and death. When treating patients, he often says: “The affairs of the world may seem complicated, but they are ultimately just the rich and the poor, the good and the evil. The principles never change—people just keep changing the phrasing and the means [2].” Figures such as Master Kuanzhan and Mr. Chen are deliberately crafted by Jia Pingwa as “eccentric sages” possessing Zen Buddhist wisdom. Like the chanter in *the Old Man* or the virtuous man in *Gulu*, they are placed above mundane society, able to view the world with detachment and offer moral insight. Yet they remain unable to control the fates of others or alter historical trajectories—they are but drops in the vast sea, mere “points” in the grand painting of life. When all sounds fall silent, they have already seen through the cycle of karma, detached from desire, and accept life with calm serenity. All of this embodies the Zen Buddhist philosophy of emptiness (*kōng*), which emphasizes extinction of delusion and the void. The state of nirvana that Zen aims for is a transcendence of worldly suffering and a supreme realm of spiritual wisdom. Zen aesthetics transform the natural world into a realm of emptiness and inward contemplation, where philosophical understanding emerges from intuitive insight rather than logical structure. This gives rise to a unique mysticism inherent in Eastern aesthetics. Clearly, Jia Pingwa seeks to use symbolic Buddhist imagery and the subtle, distilled language of Zen to portray characters’ paths toward inner awakening.

4. Poeticization: the symbolic and implicit beauty

From a cross-cultural perspective, Eastern aesthetic thought views the universe, nature, and humanity as an organic, unified, and dynamic whole, consciously maintaining harmony between humans and nature. It embodies a strong ecological consciousness, as reflected in China’s concept of “the unity of heaven and man,” the Indian Buddhist notion of “Brahman and self as one,” the Japanese idea of “unity between gods and humans,” and the ancient Egyptian belief in a cyclical “rebirth of life” repeated every three thousand years involving land, sky, and marine animals.[10] This stands in sharp

contrast to Western aesthetics, which is highly speculative and theoretical. By comparison, Eastern aesthetics incorporates the unique aesthetic consciousness of Eastern peoples and maintains an independent stance within the global aesthetic landscape. More specifically, Chinese aesthetics, centered around “imagery” and “artistic conception”, and Japanese aesthetics, characterized by *mono no aware*, *yūgen*, and *wabi-sabi*, both emphasize symbolism, implicitness, suggestion, and mystery, thus forming the distinctive aesthetic thinking of Eastern cultures. With expressive categories such as *qiyun* (spiritual resonance), *xushi* (void and solid), *miaoshen* (marvelous spirit), *daqing* (emotional resonance with the Dao), *liqu* (philosophical interest), *pinwei* (taste), *gangrou* (hard and soft), and *dongjing* (movement and stillness), the Eastern aesthetic sphere presents a unique way of living imbued with poetic sentiment and magnificent beauty. Influenced by classical Chinese aesthetics and Japan’s *mono no aware*-based aesthetic tradition, Jia Pingwa is dedicated to refining every sentence in the Chinese language and endeavors to revitalize classical thought and aesthetic paradigms in new discursive contexts, thereby promoting the modern transformation of classical Chinese traditions. His prose style, characterized by the elegance of *quji* (quiet delight) and the mysterious grace of *yūgen*, serves as a crucial vehicle for manifesting the spiritual essence of Eastern aesthetics in the “Qinling” series of novels.

Jia Pingwa’s “Qinling” series focuses on the Qinling Mountains, and as a geographical landscape, it naturally involves a wealth of descriptions of natural and human scenery, endowing his language style with strong prose-like characteristics. The language in *Shanben* is rich in meaning despite its brevity, simple in form yet abundant in spirit. It reflects contemplation of reality, metaphysical pondering of nothingness, and intuitive understanding of emptiness. The poeticized language carries the vitality of classical Chinese prose; meanwhile, the colloquial expressions are infused with the flavor of rustic dialects. Loose, fragmentary, and seemingly casual, yet light, fluid, and bright—this constitutes a style of *puzhuo* (unpolished simplicity), meaning clumsy at first glance but profoundly skillful, naïve in appearance yet rich in meaning. Through the rustic expressions, the charm of human affairs, objects, and nature are vividly revealed. Jia Pingwa does not fall into the “trap of language”; instead, in both his linguistic philosophy and practice, he adopts an open and innovative stance rather than a conservative or closed one. He arranges syntax and diction flexibly—turning long sentences into short ones, short into long, and interweaving the two—ensuring that the language remains vibrant and unpretentious. The rhythm of the language sometimes shifts dramatically, moving from vivid vernacular to refined classical expressions, allowing the individual to enjoy the freedom of nature and perceive the beauty of all beings. An overall review of Jia Pingwa’s depictions of people, events, and scenery in the Qinling region reveals that his pursuit of “interest” (*qu*) and “quietude” (*ji*) constitutes a core expression of his aesthetic aspiration.

Chinese culture has long attributed to tea a spiritual symbolism of “bitterness and astringency,” and aesthetic value to its *sewei* (astringent flavor).[11] The aesthetics of astringency is often employed to represent moral character; a person with *sewei* is typically considered to possess a temperament and demeanor surpassing the ordinary. In *Shanben*, Lu Juren, as the chief steward of a tea business, visits County Magistrate Ma along with Jing Zongxiu and others. Ma personally makes tea for the guests: “The water boiled, and Magistrate Ma scraped a pinch from the tea brick into the pot, then poured in hot water. The first brew produced a brownish liquid with a glossy luster, which he discarded. The second infusion, poured into cups, was amber-colored, faintly glowing with a golden sheen.” After making the tea, Magistrate Ma commented: “Su Shi once said that fine tea is like a beautiful woman. He was comparing tea to feminine beauty—green tea, for instance, is like Miss Liu here: tender, graceful, and shyly charming. Black tea, on the other hand, is like our manager here—veiled like a woman behind a pipa, yet brimming with vibrant vitality, refined through vicissitudes and uniquely distinguished.”[2] Following Magistrate Ma’s suggestion, Lu Juren sends someone to procure black tea. Upon returning from the plains, Fang Ruiyi delivers a list of tools

required for black tea processing, which clearly outlines the nine major steps: harvesting, unwrapping and chopping, hoisting, fermenting, steaming, pounding, sealing, drying, and stacking. The concise language presents the black tea-making process in full, revealing the aesthetic charm of the tea ceremony through its craftsmanship, tasting techniques, and the contemplative experience of tea appreciation. At its core, the Chinese tea ceremony embodies the principle of harmony (he). Tasting tea is not only a leisure pursuit amid busy life or a solace in hardship but also a practice of seeking harmony and stability. Through savoring tea and comprehending its Dao, people attain unity between form and spirit, gain insights into the path of life, and express aesthetic sentiment and spiritual longing. Magistrate Ma, calm and refined, prefers black tea and jokes about his simple life of eating and sleeping, besides studying the flora of the Qinling Mountains, aspiring only to write a Chronicle of Qinling—much like Wang Yisheng in *The Chess Master*, who lived only for eating and playing chess. This reflects a Daoist philosophy of harmony between heaven and man, as well as a Zen-like character, exemplifying the Eastern aesthetic notion of “judging character through tea.” The contrast between refreshing green tea and bitter black tea further accentuates the withered, simple, and elegant beauty of black tea. Jia Pingwa subtly weaves the philosophy of the tea ceremony into his characters’ traits, vividly conveying the aesthetic consciousness of ji—elegant restraint, rustic simplicity, and profound stillness—bringing forth the symbolic and implicit beauty of Eastern aesthetics.

From the perspective of literary aesthetics, the concept of shen yun you xuan (spiritual resonance and subtle profundity) is often employed in expressing emotions through depictions of scenery, in pursuit of “charm” (yunwei) and “lingering sentiment” (yuqing). It is a form of implicit beauty and emotional resonance that suggests meaning beyond words—what is not said often carries deeper meaning than what is expressed. In *Shanben*, the dialogue between Jing Zongxiu and Lu Juren is characterized by a paradoxical blend of evasion and openness. When Lu Juren directly tells Jing Zongxiu that she intends to groom Huasheng to become his wife, Jing replies, “In this matter, I’ll follow your decision.”[2] When Lu questions how the shoes Jing bought for her fit so well, he says, “I took one look at your feet and knew your size.”[2] When they argue about Jing becoming a brigade commander and disregarding his reputation, he responds, “Not just in my eyes—you should know where you stand in my heart. It was you who gave me a wooden shovel; it takes wind to winnow the grain. You want the wind to blow stronger, right? So I can winnow a bigger pile?”[2] In emotional expression, it is often the more restrained language that moves the heart, whereas ornate rhetoric may feel disingenuous. Jia Pingwa’s portrayal of love is linguistically rich and multifaceted—both hazy and direct, reserved yet passionate, ambiguous yet lucid. The exchanges between Lu Juren and Jing Zongxiu present a relationship that is simultaneously real and illusory, clear yet shrouded, flowing like water into one’s bones, settling like stone in the depths of the heart—hidden from view, buried but unwilling to be forgotten. Likewise, in *Shanben*, Master Kuanzhan expresses what words cannot through the sound of the shakuhachi, enacting a musical embodiment of the phrase, “At this moment, silence surpasses words”—finite language giving way to infinite meaning. Jia Pingwa thus relies on the aesthetic style of shen yun you xuan to create a unique artistic realm characterized by the Qinling Mountains’ remote, tranquil, and meditative atmosphere, achieving an aesthetic ideal where words fall short, and meaning transcends language.

This mysterious, ethereal, and crystal-clear language carries the beauty of unspoken feeling and the poignancy of silence, evoking a faint melancholy and a sense of cold solitude that crystallizes within the ever-changing tide of history. *The Old Man* and *Chronicles of Qinling* share many similarities in linguistic form—uneven line lengths, frequent repetition of phrases, the use of plain and peaceful vocabulary, and humble, subdued tones. All these reflect Jia Pingwa’s effort to strip away excess ornamentation and to push the aesthetic of simplicity to its limit, conveying subtle and restrained emotional hues. *The Old Man* consists of four stories, each beginning with excerpts from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, which are then explained before the story unfolds. In describing

landscapes, Jia favors dynamic verbs such as “stab,” “tie,” “enter,” “summon,” and “nest,” imbuing the text with a spirit of naturalness, conciseness, mystery, and strangeness. *Chronicles of Qinling*, on the other hand, constructs its vocabulary from names of mountains, rivers, grasses, and trees. Through the use of modal particles, interjections, and exclamatory words, it forms sentences of varying lengths, crafting a rhythm that is fluid, peculiar, and airy. Just as in *Border Town*, phrases like “The big fish will bite you” and “Picking tiger ear grass” become symbols of love between Cuicui and Nuosong, the linguistic imagery in Jia’s work becomes a metaphor for emotion. Every blade of grass, every flower and branch, embodies the poetic charm of nature—pure beauty found in the mundane, a sense of simplicity found in the unadorned. Beauty originates in everyday life, yet it is also a sublimation of reality. While pursuing authenticity and expressiveness, Jia Pingwa does not forget to retain the living quality of literary language—faithfully restoring the essence of objects, people, and events. He integrates the meditative flavor of Chan (Zen) Buddhism into the atmosphere of shen yun you xuan, building a spiritual bridge between humanity and nature. The mountains, rivers, flowers, grasses, birds, and insects all become infused with his literary imagination, evoking a sense of mist-like vagueness, distant serenity, and mysterious profundity. Through this, readers can feel an emotional resonance with the great cosmos and sense the mutual coloring of human sentiment and natural beauty.

5. Conclusion

The ancients emphasized the cultivation of aesthetic consciousness, often using poetry and prose to articulate beauty. Aesthetic awareness occupies a central place in Eastern aesthetics, which stresses harmony between humans and nature, individuals and society, the self and the collective. Intertwined with religion and ethics, it conveys an affirmation of and dedication to life and existence. When examining Jia Pingwa’s *Qinling* series of novels through the lens of Eastern aesthetics, it becomes clear that his works are imbued with rich aesthetic connotations. Within the flowing, illusory realms akin to “flowers in the mirror and the moon in the water,” one perceives the ebb and flow of life and the cyclical nature of cause and effect. Human affairs and material phenomena progress in parallel, mutually reinforcing one another, further highlighting the primordial chaos of the *Qinling* landscape, the flux of human affairs, and the cyclical rhythm of history. Jia Pingwa masterfully draws upon the myriad forms of heaven and earth, the generative principles of yin and yang, and the profound philosophy of life and morality. Employing a narrative technique that balances the real and the imagined, he achieves a unity of the tangible and the intangible, the visible and the hidden, the finite and the infinite. In doing so, he evokes imaginative beauty and infinite poetic meaning. Viewed in this light, Jia Pingwa uses the imagery of the vast natural world to narrate both material and human stories, presenting the aesthetic spirit of Chinese cultural ethos. By weaving Buddhist and Daoist thought into the fabric of his narratives, he reveals the subtle charm of Eastern aesthetics and exemplifies the “beauty” and “mystery” it embodies. His work stands as a model of how contemporary writers may both inherit and innovate upon classical traditions.

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