



## An Emerging Ecological Reportage Literature in China

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**Abstract:** Ecological reportage literature came into being along with the increasing worsening of ecological crisis. The paper elaborates on its existing practical soil, motif and its significance. The author put forward the idea that only if the global problems of environmental crisis and ecological imbalance were to be solved, ecological reportage literature would withdraw from the historical stage.

**Keywords:** reportage literature, ecological reportage literature, environmental crisis, ecological imbalance, ecological crisis

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of reportage literature was first coined in Europe less than 100 years ago and was introduced to China via Japan in the 1930s. As a new literary genre, it can be as popular as poetry, novel, essay, and drama and it plays a thriving new role in literary world.

The emergence of reportage literature was the result of average people's desire for information; it is not pure news report or entire literature in the traditional sense. It is word-writing and picture-based writing on the basis of the real information. It is the real expression of facts and characters based on author's observation, discovery and understanding (Li, 2009:3).

Reportage literature could not survive without the soil of reality. The closer to reality, the stronger and fresher message it conveys to society, hence the more popularly received by audience. It evolves and adapts to the fast development of society and combines the advantages of both news and literature. It also appears in the form of "neo-news", "nonfiction", "report literature", "documentary literature", "newspaper literature", "journalist literature", and it is the literature of the era and is writing a new history of literature (Li, 2009:6).

#### 1.1. Background

With the rapid progress of industrialization and urbanization of China over the past three decades, China has become the world's second largest economy in terms of gross domestic product (since 2010) and the world's largest energy consumer (since 2009)(Chen, 2013:382).

Although this rapid economic development has improved people's living conditions to a large extent, it also brought about a series of serious health threats and environmental issues in the country. In terms of ecological crisis, China is facing water pollution, air pollution, soil contamination, over-exploitation of natural resources, the degradation of forests, desertification of some areas, extinction of certain species, greenhouse gas increase, metals and minerals depletion, and natural disasters, etc.

We cannot live without water. There are three major water resources problems: water pollution, shortage of water resources and waste of water resources. The problem with water resources is one of China's obstacles to achieve sustainable development in the 21st century.

Soil contamination is typically caused by human activities, industrial activities, agricultural chemicals, or improper disposal of waste. In total, nearly 16.1% of China's soil was polluted (Chen et al., 2014). These pollutions have caused a serious impact on the growth of crops and the health of the people. It poses a threat to the environment, to food safety and to sustainable agriculture.

Air pollution is also a critical issue, especially in northern parts of China. Since 2012, smog has begun to hit those areas, which resulted from gasoline-powered vehicles, coal-fired power plants, heavy

industry and factories. The serious air pollution is responsible for heart disease, stroke, respiratory illnesses, birth defects and cancer.

Literature is a mirror of real society. Faced with so many environmental problems, writers cannot turn a blind eye to the serious situation. Some of them shoulder the responsibility and depict the pollution in their literary works in purpose of arousing readers' strong awareness of environmental protection. They explored and depicted severely polluted rivers and lakes, destroyed forests, expanded deserts, endangered fauna and flora. Thus the reportage literature came into being. It reminds people that they should not forget to pursue and protect the beauty of the mother earth and the great nature which all human beings rely on for survival and reproduction. They regard it their duty and mission to call on people to fight against any form of pollution for Nature, for sustainable development of society, for people themselves, and for their future generations.

## 2. FEATURES OF REPORTAGE LITERATURE

### 2.1. Principle of Being True to Life

Being true to life is the fundamental difference between reportage literature and other forms of fictional literature. It cannot be made up nor imagined; instead it is a description and report of social life and existence. It was born out of news and contains the key feature of the latter—being true to life. But it does not mean building with words or a pile of source materials, it needs refining, filling, clipping with author's own imagination. In this way, the image of the characters that are shaped can be richer, fuller and brilliant while their main virtues can stand out among the numerous source materials. That is to say, the reportage literature is involved in author's imagination within a certain limit; therefore it is totally different from the vast imagination in a novel. The author reproduces the whole process of the story based on the true life materials and the imagination is limited to the scope of facts that once existed.

### 2.2. Principle of Being Realistic to Life

Reportage literature was born out of news; hence it contains the feature of the latter—being realistic to life. But it is different from news in that the main features of news is being true, new, fast, short and real. Reportage literature is dependent on the real social life, its existence and development is closely related to the latter in different historical periods, and it is certain that real social life is the rich soil of reportage literature which is also a galloping battlefield (Li, 2009:183).

Considering the features of news, it can be found easily that news reported by news and the reportage literature cannot be simply equated. News is a barometer of social life which keeps a close watch on and presents the tendency and changes of social life. In today's era of advanced technology and diversified media transmission, messages in-flight from occurring to transmitting to the vast mass can be realized without any delay, that is to say, synchronously conveyed. Compared with the fast speed, reportage literature cannot achieve such efficiency. Reportage literature deals with social life intrinsically while news achieves such effects more directly and extrinsically. Through the relevant important events behind the facts, reportage literature writers see and discover the significance, functions, influences and outcomes of those facts. What happens in life is not necessarily reported but the priority is given to its value and social significance. Reportage literature focuses on those grand events, great figures and social hot issues that are adequate to impact and change social life.

### 2.3. Principle of Literariness

The artistic feature of reportage literature is based on the truth and facts of the events, no matter in China or in the rest of the world, numerous things happen every day, not each of the happening is worth reporting, thus the selection of the fact involves the skills of literariness. Being true to life is not only the basic element of reportage resources, but also the charm of it. Being true to life is both the starting and finishing points, as well as the foundation and stage of art and literature (Li, 2009:193).

## 3. ECO-REPORTAGE LITERATURE

Due to the fact that reportage literature, with the features of being true to life, is concerned about the great typical events in social life, reportage literature writers cannot turn a blind eye to nor look on unconcerned about the present imbalance of ecology, as well as the seriousness of environmental pollution. Hence the green eco-reportage literature came into being. In 1986, a Chinese

writer Xugang's work *Loggers, Wake up!* marked the beginning that Chinese writers tried to respond and think over the environmental problems by means of literature. In the same year, a famous writer Sha Qing published an eco-reportage work entitled *Beijing Lost Balance*, which marked the beginning of eco-reportage literature in China.

Eco-reportage literature refers to those reportage works which, starting from the idea of modern ecology, revealing the ecological imbalance and environmental crisis as the main content, mainly deal with the relationship between human and nature, and promote ecological and environmental protection (Gong, 2004:48-54). Through ecological awareness and wisdom exemplified in the literary works, eco-reportage literature exposes people's negligence and wanton destruction of environment; arouse readers' pity, sympathy, understanding and respect for Nature in the purpose of environmental protection. Eco-reportage literature, together with eco-poetry, eco-novel and eco-play, is a branch of eco-literature.

### 3.1. The Soil of Eco-Reportage Literature

As human society enters the age of globalization, various global problems are increasingly prominent, "home" topic of human existence is put on the table. The tense relationship between human and nature becomes a complicated multifaceted contradiction.

In the last 50 years of the 20th century, environment was destroyed and polluted unprecedentedly, hence 10 serious global environmental problems occurred, namely "greenhouse effect", atmospheric ozone layer destruction, acid rain pollution, diffuse-ion of toxic chemicals, soil erosion, population explosion, a massive fall in forests, expansion of land desertification, water pollution and shortage, and reduction of biodiversity. Ecologists pointed out that the 10 serious global environmental problems have threatened the existence of human beings and the sustainable development of human civilization, and are cruelly tearing up every beautiful dream and hope of human beings, which will affect the existence and development of not only one or two generations, but several or even a couple of generations to come. Human beings cater the fashion of taking from nature, enjoying themselves to the extremes, abandoning responsibilities of protecting nature, rapid economic growth and rapid decay. Experts pointed out that human beings are doomed to pay the heavy price for the destruction of environment—health, comfort, and productivity (Gong, 2012:178).

When it comes to China, environment is a heavy topic. According to a survey on ecology conducted by Chinese Academy of Sciences, China's current ecological statue was described like this: "nature deficiency and nurture disorder with unfavorable conditions and serious vandalism; partial improvement but deterioration on the whole; governance capability being far behind the speed of destruction, and the quality of the environment being worsening day by day, as a result, the largest scale and broadest coverage as well as the most serious consequences of ecological destruction and environmental pollution occurring in China (Gong,2012:178)."

China's forest coverage is 9% , being one of the most hazardous countries in the world with the largest, the fastest spreading, and the most widely distributed desertification land area.

China ranks 122nd in water resources in the world and is one of the 13 countries which are scarce in water supplies. China's water resources are unevenly distributed. Compared with the northwest China, most of the water concentrates in the southeast. China is facing a water crisis that includes water shortages, water pollution and deterioration in water quality. In the northern parts, due to the drying up of the surface water, the underground water has been over-extracted. Northern China is now relying on underground water that was formed 10,000 years ago to meet the demand of China's large population, which has resulted in ground cracking and subsidence in some regions. The situation is not sustainable.

"Mother river" of China—the "Yellow River" began to dry up in 1972 and records of dripless water entering the sea had amounted to 330 days up to 1998. It is estimated that on present trend, channel cutoff of the lower reaches of the Yellow River would constitute one of the greatest environmental problems in China and the Yellow River would definitely become an inland river by 2020. The total amount of sewage discharge in China is very large and over 90% of city water is worsening, as a result, drinkable water is on the decrease. Many poisonous, dirty and smelly rivers flow into the seas which pollute the whole waters. Discharges of toxic and harmful chemicals into the sea are absorbed

by marine organisms, and our health is affected through the food chain.

Famous Chinese writer Zhe Fu completed his great series of River reports in 2002: *Ecological Report of the Yangtze River*, *Ecological Report of the Yellow River* and *Ecological Report of Huaihe River*, which expressed his deep concern and pain for the pollution of the three great rivers in China.

A case in point is Huaihe River which is the most seriously polluted river in China. Ranking the 6th largest river in China, it is also one of the most important rivers in East China. It takes the waters of thousands of rivers and accepts various tributaries on the way, so the water volume increases rapidly and the water level goes up promptly. But one fact cannot be ignored; day and night millions of tons of waste water is poured down into it from hundreds of factories. At present there is no fish in it. The river water cannot be drunk. People on either bank have to dig wells to take drinking water. It is so dirty and poisonous that people even don't dare to swim in it.

After witnessing the difficult situation of Guishan (a famous scenic spot in Hubei Province) fishermen, Deputy Director of Ministry of Water Resources said, "due to fishery failure, fishermen are heavily in debt, some are forced to leave their homes. As a government official in charge of fishing industry, I feel deeply distressed! I am quite concerned about the social stability which is greatly threatened! More places are affected by polluted water. Cities and towns along the Huaihe River suffer from the serious problem. Villagers on both sides of the Shayinghe River in Henan Province are faced with the same situation. Some senior cadres say they did not die in the volleys of gunfire but might die of the destruction of polluted water! Pollution affects not only the economic development, but also shakes the foundation of our existence!" (Chen, 2005:3)

Environmental protection authorities tested 73 reaches of Huaihe River and found only one reached the standard of good water quality, 18 were slightly polluted and the rest 54 were severely polluted. The pollution of other rivers cannot be overlooked. With the surging development of agriculture and industry and the rapid increase of township and village enterprises, more and more rural domestic sewerage, industrial waste water, urban rubbish, fertilizers and pesticides in the fields are discharged into rivers which eventually become smelly and dirty. Aimless pursuit of economic benefits results in ecological crisis in Huaihe River (Wang, 2017).

Along with the development and progress of society, human obtained the resources from the river immoderately without the reasonable protection of the river itself. The deforestation and pollution have caused the landscape and ecology of rivers seriously destructed.

Enterprises dealing with prosperous industries such as paper making, textile printing and dyeing, chemical products, machinery, metallurgy, digging, iron and steel, electric power, winery, food processing, textile, fertilizer and coal, drain contamination into Huaihe River. As a consequence, villagers along the Huaihe River do not have access to clean drinking water and many "cancer villages" have appeared. It seems that where there are chemical plants, there are "cancer villages" nearby. Unfortunately villagers have to purchase bottled mineral water to drink and they become "ecological refugees" or "forced immigrants". Soil, vegetables and crops are polluted; as a result, people's quality of life is on the sharp decrease.

Air pollution in northern cities in China began to arouse people's concern in the winter of 2012. China's sulfur dioxide emissions in the atmosphere rank first in the world. The US and China are the world's biggest oil consumers and biggest emitters of greenhouse gases. Smoggy days are on the increase year by year. Environmental pollution especially air pollution seriously affects people's daily life. No one can live healthily without fresh air. It is a happy surprise and even a luxury to see the blue sky in big cities in China, esp. in winter. Fortunately Chinese government has made great efforts to deal with this problem and has achieved very positive results.

### 3.2. The Motif of Eco-Reportage Literature

Eco-reportage literature mainly focuses on human-nature relationship and regards the harmonious coexistence of human and nature as its highest pursuit and ultimate goal. Birds, animals, flowers, fish and insects, forests and trees, rivers, seas, lakes and oceans, mountains, deserts, houses are all parts of the world, so are human beings. The relationship between humans and natural parts of the world is a basic one and it is better to consider human beings as equal members of the world instead of conquering, transforming or utilizing other nonhuman members. Humans should not only care about themselves, but also pay close attention to the benefits of plants and animals, all the other different

forms of life, and the whole ecological system. Eco-reportage literature is aimed at reporting those inharmonious relationships between human and nature, and oriented to real social existence and sustainable development (Gong, 2012:174).

The horizons of Chinese ecologists are broadened increasingly as they begin to shift their emphasis from realization that there is only one China to the fact that human beings only have one Earth. Their logic is simple but powerful. If our development resulted in the loss of our only home in the vast universe, then what would be the point of such development? When consumerism becomes sort of ideological, ecological awareness begins to be a part of Chinese culture, although it is a marginalized ideology (Gong, 2012:175). To seek coexistence and mutual benefits of human and nature is the motif of eco-reportage literature.

### 3.3. Practical Significance of Eco-Reportage Literature

Since the mid-1980s, eco-reportage literature has been making efforts to appeal for people's attention and in 1990s it formed its cultural awareness. A large number of good writers and influential reportage literary works have ascended the stage and drawn wide attention from all social circles.

Eco-reportage literature warns human beings that if people neglect ecological environment in the development of economy, the so-called skyrocketing economy is a flash in the pan. What's more, it will endanger human's existence. It warns people that the only effective way to achieve social sustainable development is to guide economy by the principle of sustainable value. Human beings must adopt new values to reexamine the problems of existence and development, and ensure the harmony, coexistence and mutual benefits between human and nature (Zhang, 2006). As a seriously polluted country, China must not undertake the old approach of developing industry first after pollution abatement, which will result in serious environmental, water pollution and destruction. China should implement the prevention measures through the process of whole social production and practice.

Writers of eco-reportage literature show great concern about the present ecological crisis and their vivid descriptions of environmental destruction stir Chinese people's awareness of environmental protection.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

With the frequent appearance of smoggy days in China, sometimes Chinese people have to wear masks to breathe the filtered "fresh air", it is distressing to see that the basic existence of fresh air becomes a luxury.

Ordinary Chinese have started to miss blue skies, clean rivers, green forests, and birds. Heart-breaking coal mine tragedies have become regular news on TV. Pollution has made cancer China's leading cause of death. Ambient air pollution alone is blamed for hundreds of thousands of deaths every year. Nearly 500 million people lack access to safe drinking water. China is choking on its own success (Wei, 2010).

As Chinese President Xi put forward in the 19th CPC National Congress that high priority must be given to making ecological progress and incorporate it into all aspects and the whole process of advancing economic, political, cultural, and social progress, work hard to build a beautiful country, and achieve lasting and sustainable development of the Chinese nation. Promoting ecological progress is a long-term task of vital importance to the people's well-being and China's future. Faced with increasing resource constraints, severe environmental pollution and a deteriorating ecosystem, we must raise our people's ecological awareness of the need to respect and protect nature. It is of great importance to conserve resources and protect the environment and promote its natural restoration, and strive for green, circular and low-carbon development. The root cause of deterioration of the ecological environment should be addressed so as to create a desirable working and living environment for the people, and contribute our share to a sound global ecosystem.

Only when more and more Chinese people begin to be aware of the importance of environmental protection and do it from themselves to implement green economy, green consumption, and green life; only when more and more Chinese people enjoy the harmony and tranquility of nature, love nature, embrace nature, protect nature and treasure nature; only when more and more Chinese people are able to breathe fresh air everywhere, see the blue sky, clear seas and lakes once again; only

when... that day really comes, ecological reportage literature would fulfill its mission and withdraw from the historical stage.

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