

Original Paper

Dialect Writing in Liu Renqian's Vernacular Novels

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Abstract

In terms of vernacular novels, it is impossible to read the divine reason and flavor of life in the dry language, and some life contents can only be expressed through dialect. It should be seen that dialect is the main form of language narration in Fragrant River. Dialect in Liu Renqian's writing no longer exists as a rhetoric, but has the status and significance of organic ontology. Dialect writing is not only a local expression of vernacular daily life, but also a way of Liu Renqian's characterization, as well as one of the ways of constructing the narrative and plot of the work. The large number of Xinghua dialects in Liu Renqian's novels prepares the atmosphere for the content of the stories, and at the same time, it also gives the characters an innate local flavor and fireworks, which well reflects the novelist's vision of making a biography of his hometown and passing on the cultural characteristics of Wang's novels. This kind of dialect writing is to keep a literary archive for the local culture, and at the same time, it is to sing an endless elegy for this dying culture.

Keywords

Liu Renqian, vernacular fiction, dialect

1. Introduction

As far as novels are concerned, what is linked below the language is the content. Contemporary Chinese writers' creations have paid considerable attention to geography, and we can easily list people such as Han Shaogong, Mo Yan, Jia Pingwa, Yan Lianke and their works, whose novels highlight the people and things of the places they write about. What is the connection between a novel and a region, and how do we readers create an impression of a certain region through reading? One is that geographical things and behaviors characteristic of the region appear in the novels; the second is that the narrative language of the novels and the language in the fictional world such as the dialogues of the characters tell us which region this is a story that takes place in.

The divine reason and flavor of life are often embodied in language, yet how much flavor is left when these contents and spirit are translated into Mandarin and put down on paper? In the dry language, we readers cannot read the divine reason and flavor of life, and some of the content of life can only be expressed through the dialect. For writers, the refinement and arrangement of language does not only refer to the mastery of Mandarin grammatical norms, but also refers to how to transcend the explanatory and narrative levels through the use of language to convey the cultural charm behind the language. Otherwise, it will become a “paralyzed language, a rootless language, a language without a homeland. It cannot stand on its own apart from the plot elements, nor does it have the texture of life and the breath of nature, much less will it glow with a certain flavor and luster formed through the long-term infiltration of regional culture” (Wang, 2001).

In modern and contemporary literature, Mandarin, as a product of universal application, adapted to national integration and communication, and as a product of a cultural community capable of ensuring the acceptance of literature by readers in different regions, has rightly become a trans-regional language of the nation and the state. However, in literary writing, certain literary qualities inevitably lose their color or even disappear after being “translated” and filtered through Putonghua (Wang, 2001). For example, contemporary Chinese writers clearly feel that the imitation of Western modernism in the 1990s is not enough. It was a literary practice without dialect or Chinese “texture” and “flavor”, because Western modernist literature, as an exotic literature, entered China and was first translated into Mandarin, and then imitated by our writers in Mandarin. This kind of writing can hardly awaken the writer’s linguistic consciousness.

It seems that in order to rectify this shortcoming, in recent years, more and more writers have consciously written in dialect or consciously keyed in a large number of dialect components in their novels. For example, *The Dictionary of Maqiao*, *Suffering from Livelihood*, *Sandalwood Torture*, and so on. Liu Renqian is undoubtedly a writer with obvious “dialect consciousness”, in terms of his *Xianghe Trilogy*, there is no “Xianghe” without language, and the dialect in his writing does not only mean rhetoric, but also has ontological significance. His dialect writing not only expresses the passing society and villages, but also presents the distinctive beauty of human nature and customs. The original Xinghua dialect is used throughout the *Xianghe Trilogy*, which carries the strong regional culture behind it.

As Zhao Benfu, a local writer, said in his own anthology, “a clever writer does not rely on plot to win, but on language, sentence by sentence, to lead you to read on” (Zhao, 2010), the charm of the novel is actually the charm of the language. Therefore, we can feel the vernacular in Liu Renqian’s novels from the language details.

2. The Vivid Expression of Local Language

Zhejiang writer Ye Wenling said when talking about the local language in the novel, “When writing novels with my hometown as the background, not only the landscape and scenery in front of my eyes are clear as a picture, but also the voices and smiles of my hometown’s fathers and mothers, and even the tone and accent of their speech, are often between my ears” (Ye & Lu, 1984). The use of local language to tell local stories is one of the most common ways of writing in local literature, and Liu Renqian used a lot of dialects and colloquialisms of the Xinghua area in his local writing. In this regard, Yang Xuemin believes that “the dialect and vernacular in the novels of the Lixiahe School does not only have the significance of dialectal records, but also has irreplaceable rhetorical significance and aesthetic value for the novel’s stylistic construction, characterization, and the expression of cultural meanings” (Yang, 2018). Accordingly, observing the dialect writing in Liu Renqian’s novels, it can be found that the use of dialect in the novels is not only a local expression of vernacular daily life, but also a way for writers to shape their characters.

2.1 *Reproduction of Vernacular Language and Vernacular Life*

In the vernacular language, dialect is the carrier of local culture, the most representative folk culture, and the emotional support of hometown and nostalgia. Dialect symbolizes the author’s feelings and expresses the writer’s cultural attachment. Letting dialect into the literary text has also become a language way to reproduce the local life. When the local colorful dialect enters the text, the texture and breath of the local life will come to the surface.

In Liu Renqian’s novels, we can see a lot of local languages, and some of these words have the same appearance as Mandarin, but their meanings are completely different, because some dialect words cannot be translated into Mandarin, and they can only be replaced by Mandarin words with similar pronunciation. Zhang Xinying once said in an article, “In dialects, sounds are more important than words, and there are quite a few dialects with sounds but no words” (Ye & Lu, 1984). Some dialect words can only be understood by placing them in a specific conversation.

In these dialect phenomena, there are a large number of ancient forms of expression. From the point of view of the history of language and culture, the dialect of Xinghua area belongs to one of the Tongtai dialect cultures in the Jianghuai dialect culture, which retains a greater number of veins of archaic forms of expression, and it is “a dialect with an older level of history” (Wang, 1999) in the Jianghuai dialect. This is also reflected in the dialectal phenomenon in Liu Renqian’s vernacular writing, which is highlighted in the use of temporal nouns, verbs, and some special epithets in daily life. The ancient expression of Xinghua dialect is very obvious, which actually reflects the deep cultural heritage and far-reaching historical traditions of this region, and also gives an insight into the ancient style and charm of this region. And this ancient style and ancient charm, so that readers of the vernacular society of Xinghua has an aesthetic sense of distance and strangeness, thus arousing the reader’s strong desire for aesthetics to help readers feel more freely Xinghua vernacular life in the simple and ancient

atmosphere. In addition, such as jingle proverbs and other folk sayings also reproduces the picture of life in Xinghua vernacular society. In the dialect writing of Liu Renqian's novels, a large number of folk languages reproduce the daily life in the countryside through witty and humorous forms of artistic expression.

The American linguist Sapir said, "Language is for us more than a mere system for the communication of ideas. It is an invisible coat that drapes over our spirit and predetermines the form of all symbolic expression of the spirit. When this expression is very interesting, we call it literature" (Sapir, 1985). Liu Renqian's purpose in introducing these dialects and colloquialisms into the text should also be to bring us closer to the daily life in the vernacular society of Xinghua to the greatest extent possible.

2.2 Dialectal Colloquialisms and Characterization

Characterization in novels is multifaceted, and language is one of the most important means. Wang Zheng said, "Dialect is the best and the last carrier of local culture, and the disappearance of dialect means the disappearance of locality" (Wang, 2014). For vernacular novels, the easy-to-understand dialect colloquialisms become an important helper for writers to shape their characters.

On the one hand, Liu Renqian's clever use of catchy jingles and epigrams in his works further emphasizes the characters' characteristics by virtue of their unique popularity and vividness. For example, in *Xianghe*, there is a jingle describing Xiangyuan, the village branch secretary, which is full of humor, but in the light-hearted banter, it makes the image of a bossy and domineering village branch secretary who seeks personal gain with his power fuller, and greatly satirizes the ugly side of human nature in that particular era. There were also naughty children who mocked their lame classmates by saying, "Five out of ten tanners are lame, and five of them are on crutches" (Liu, 2010). Jingles such as these are not so much a portrayal of people with disabilities in the countryside as they are a revelation of the amount and depth of discrimination that these disadvantaged groups suffer in the vernacular society. These jingles vividly portray the typical characteristics of these these images through labeled descriptions, greatly enriching the genealogy and presentation of characters in Liu Renqian's vernacular novels.

On the other hand, dialect colloquialisms are closer to colloquial expressions and thus more likely to show the ups and downs of the characters' emotions, as shown in a typical expression in *Xianghe*. When Liu Renqian describes the scene of Xianghe villagers' gathering and drinking, he writes: "After a day's labor, most of the male generals in Xianghe village are next to the stove, pinching their mothers-in-law's freshly fried peanuts, pinching a few chopsticks of chives and scrambled eggs and other small dishes, and wrenching on a small bottle of 'two-twenty-five'. The local people of wine, not to eat, not to drink, not to drink, but called the trigger" (Liu, 2010). The word "wrench" is a dialect of Xinghua, which means to bring down. Generally speaking, "drinking" is the life of literati and elegant people, while "eating" has the atmosphere of the jianghu of Lu Zhishen in the *Water Margin*. "Drinking" and slightly ordinary, and Xinghua people prefer to say "trigger", for the simple and honest

farmers, dinner time to drink a little wine is the biggest treat for their hard work of the day, so only to put the bottle of wine “trigger”. Therefore, the only way to feel cozy and comfortable is to drink from the bottle.

Tolstoy said, “Motion and the manifestation of motion—the verb—this is the basis of language... Finding an exact verb for a sentence—that is to make the sentence express movement” (Tolstoy, 1980). The word “wrench” in Xinghua dialect makes the image of coarse farmers more three-dimensional, and is also able to express the bravado and spontaneity of rural people when they drink to the fullest. Dialect is the common language of a place, and the use of dialect can also reflect the character of the local people, in Liu Renqian’s writing, the unique charm of Xinghua dialect colloquialisms can also make the ordinary vernacular characters glow with a different charm.

3. The Independent Character and Functional Performance of Dialect

When we pay attention to the dialect in the novel, we are not just making a reciprocal link of meaning between dialect words and Mandarin words, but we are concerned with the spiritual life of the vernacular people under the language. In other words, how does dialect express the spirit of the local people? The “linguistic consciousness” of contemporary Chinese writers refers to the return of Chinese writing from westernized language writing. Liu Renqian has been living in the rural area of Xinghua for a long time and has been deeply immersed in the local culture, so his language style is also vernacular. The dialect of Liu Renqian’s writing not only has the independent character and meaning of organic ontology, but also becomes one of the ways of constructing the narrative and plot of his works.

3.1 The Independent Character of Dialect

The use of dialect in writers’ creations has been discussed for a long time. Although the phenomenon of being sidelined in a particular circle of writers has always existed, creators and critics concerned with dialect writing have always tried to prove its superiority and uniqueness. If writing in Mandarin is a necessity to seek common ground, then writing in dialect is a necessity to preserve differences. If Chinese novels want to preserve the real Chinese characteristics, the dialect element cannot be abandoned. According to He Xizhang and Wang Zhong, “Putonghua writing has constructed the specific language mode and way of thinking of modern literature. Dialect, as a form of literary discourse outside the norms, possesses special aesthetic qualities, and it is a dissolution of the specificity and universality of Chinese writing. It dialogues with the world from a non-ideological, empirical, and life perspective, emphasizing more on the authenticity and individuality of existence” (He & Wang, 2006). This assertion reflects a certain sense of anxiety, which leads one to ponder what the future of dialect writing will be. Liu Renqian also tries to answer this question in the creative dimension.

Language has an independent power, and the dialect in Liu Renqian’s works is unique in aesthetics. For example, the folk songs and proverbs in the middle of the novels or interspersed with them have

become an indispensable part of Liu Renqian's novels and stories. Novels are a genre that does not pay attention to rhyme, and focus on rhyming folk songs and slang proverbs combined with the attempts in the writers' creations are not uncommon, which is also a classic example of the blending of folklore and writers' creations, and if it is used properly, it will be the icing on the cake. From an aesthetic point of view, compared with the standard and regular Mandarin, dialect slang is lively and dynamic, showing independent and rich aesthetic interests. As in Mikhail's *Still Don River* (Mikhail, 2010). Just as the beautiful Cossack songs in the novel bring readers a unique and fascinating experience, Liu Renqian has also accumulated a wealth of resources in this area under the influence of his childhood life, which he has aptly integrated into the creation of the novel. In the village of *Xianghe*, girls, boys and young women working in the fields, whether they are full of energy or tired, love to express their feelings with songs. A small folk song, melodious and melodious, but the meaning is obvious, showing the softness of the heart of the people of Lixiahe and the directness of the mouth. Tenderness and subtlety and boldness were originally contradictory, but in the Lixiahe people and Lixiahe songs are integrated properly and naturally, filling both people and songs with a harmonious sense of beauty.

3.2 Narrative Functions of Dialect

In addition to independent "language", the dialect in Liu Renqian's novels also undertakes certain textual functions. The slang dialect speaks for the characters, serves the narrative, and adds color to the story. When Liu Renqian, who was born and grew up in the area, tells about the people on the land and treats the townspeople as important reading objects, the use of dialect slang is natural and logical.

As far as Xinghua is concerned, Liu Renqian grew up in here, created in here, and the background of his novels points to here, and never left the scene. His writing in many dialects, represented by *Xianghe*, can even be used as a living book for the study of Jianghuai dialect. When a call comes, the narrative is immediately labeled with a distinct region, and the reader then enters the village of *Xianghe* and the vernacular world of Xinghua. The use of dialect slang adds a sense of presence to the whole story of *Xianghe*, and the narrator, even if he fails to play a role in the story, is never far away, and the writer is no longer an ordinary bystander, but just an alternative member of the village hidden for the sake of necessity.

Liu Renqian always thinks, don't look at the *Xianghe* village people foreign accent, some dialect words used really quite see the level, slightly ancient meaning. The novelist has a point, which also strongly confirms that the culture of Xinghua region has a long history, and dialect language is often more complete preservation of cultural roots. In this kind of confrontation and integration of the Jianghuai dialect narrative, the characters are rough in detail, the narrative content of the vulgar in elegant, the story in the plain reveals a different luster.

3.3 Performance of Plot Construction Function of Dialect

In Liu Renqian's novels, there are a large number of folk songs and slang proverbs in addition to dialects. In addition to the narrative function, the folk songs and slang proverbs in a particular text play

a certain role in the structure.

First of all, ballads play a role in helping the village to build the story structure under certain conditions. In the title page of Liu Renqian's novel *The Remnant Moon*, there are the following: "In the Three Forks Harbor of Chenjiagou, nine out of ten girls are raised", and "People in Chenjiagou have no aunts, people in Sanqiao Harbor have no uncles" (Liu, 2012). The first one opens with another solemn admonition to the reader, "You'd better not take the gossip about Sanqiao Harbor and Chenjiagou that you've learned in other places and bring it to this place" (Liu, 2012). Why is it that in the Three Forks Harbor of Chenjiagou, nine out of ten girls are raised? Chenjiagou people have no aunts, Sanqiao Harbor people have no uncles? Although according to the literal meaning and combined with the understanding of the regional folk customs, we can vaguely figure out one or two, but not very clear, so the ballad that appeared twice at the beginning of the novel, together with the novelist's advice, magnetically attracted us to go to the work to find out what is going on. As we read on, we gradually realize the social reality and folklore of Xinghua in Jiangsu Province behind the ballads. Looking back at the beginning of the story, we understand why it is taboo to mention these two ballads to the locals, and reading through the whole story, we will understand that they are, to some extent, the key to explaining the rationality of the whole text, and that the ballads and the folklore psychology behind them have become an invisible force that pushes the development of the story, and that this kind of folklore psychology is silent but indestructible.

Secondly, folk songs can also contribute to the development of the storyline. Folk songs and slang proverbs appear more frequently in *Xianghe*, and they promote the development of the story many times. As soon as the folk songs, which boldly express the love between a man and a woman, are played, the girls in the rice fields burst into laughter. In a village, it is very easy for people to know about trivial matters, and Xiaoqin and Chunyu's mutual feelings for each other are naturally no exception. The little song in the paddy field that conveys love and affection is the front-runner, attracting men and women to take advantage of the opportunity to find out the truth. The girl is naturally not good to speak first, but Liu Chunyu's brain is the emotional folk songs to wake up, "Qin like me, I also like her, why not ever find an opportunity to talk about it?" (Liu, 2010). This idea is ignited, which directly promotes the further development of Chunyu's and Qin's romance in the following story, and the folk song of love becomes the "matchmaker" for the two of them. In addition, it is the love song, together with the echoes of Chunyu and Qin, that ignites the ghostly fire of another person's heart: Lu Ganshui, who has secretly loved Qin for a long time. His desire for revenge grows at that moment. Therefore, the folk song not only planted hope, but also sowed the root of trouble, promoting the development of the storyline from both the bright and dark sides.

4. The Value and Significance of Writing in Dialect

Language is an important criterion to measure the success or failure of a literary work. The large number of Xinghua dialects in Liu Renqian's novels prepares the atmosphere for the content of the stories, and at the same time gives the characters an innate local flavor and smoky atmosphere, which well reflects the novelist's vision of making a biography of his hometown and passing on the cultural characteristics of Wang's novels. For example, *Xianghe* mines folk language and dialect to an imaginative depth. The use of Xinghua dialect is the key to guide the reader into the world of *Xianghe*; the richness of the living color of the Xinghua dialect, the innate and highly textured power of the language, undoubtedly, also saturates Liu Renqian's work.

4.1 Beyond the Ontological Value of Rhetoric

Ding Fan once commented on Liu Renqian in this way, "Another noteworthy artistic tendency is that, so far, of all the literary works reflecting this region, Liu Renqian is the first author to adopt the northern Soviet dialect for his writing" (Ding, 2015). Wang Zheng, for his part, similarly argues that Liu Renqian is a quiet writer who, amidst the clamor of literary trends, remains true to himself and arranges his unchanging life in dialect. That is to say, Liu Renqian has been narrating the ancient unchanging life on this land with his own dialect, and singing the time-honored way of living in the era of farming civilization on this land.

His *Fragrant River Trilogy*, as a whole, presents a hybrid linguistic form based on the local dialect of Xinghua, supplemented by modern Chinese and spoken folk language, which makes the language of the work extremely watery and fluid, even in the later *Floating City* and *Remnants of the Moon*, which likewise let the linguistic fragments of the local dialect float and permeate the text everywhere. Unlike in many novels where dialect is only used as a kind of rhetoric to add color to the text, in Liu Renqian's works, dialect makes a great contribution with its main position.

As Binbin Wang puts it, "One of the things that Nietzsche prided himself on throughout his life was the beauty of his own German expression, the poetic, poetic nature of his own expression of ideas in German... I sometimes think that the most praiseworthy contribution that a writer can make is a linguistic one" (Wang, 2018). As mentioned earlier, Liu Renqian brings the imagination of Xinghua dialect and dialect to the extreme, and it is because of this that we find that Liu Renqian is bringing dialect into literature, then the dialect itself acquires the status of an organic subject, acquiring a special kind of ecological and imaginative power. The language itself is no longer just a literary archive that preserves folklore and local customs, but it is also a kind of literary narrative ecology, an inalienable way of narrating the protagonist of the work.

Thus, we should see that dialect is the main form of language narration in *Xianghe*, and the dialect in Liu Renqian's writing is not just as rhetoric, but has the status and significance of an organic ontology. Here, I use Zhao Benfu, a vernacular writer from northern Jiangsu Province, to make a comparison. The dialect that appears in Zhao Benfu's novels is the Xuzhou regional dialect, which is different from

the Wu dialect of Jiangsu Province and the Jianghuai dialect of central Jiangsu Province where Liu Renqian lived, but is a kind of northern dialect, somewhat similar to Shandong dialect. Since Putonghua is based on the northern dialect, we do not have the same obstacles when reading Zhao Benfu's novels as the northerners do when reading *The Legend of the Flowers of the Sea*, and thus the same obstacles do not arise when reading Zhao Benfu's novels. On the whole, Zhao Benfu's novels do not have too many dialect markers, not because the writers deliberately use Putonghua against their own linguistic viewpoints, but because the Xuzhou dialect belongs to the northern dialect; in detail, the unique vocabulary and language organization in the Xuzhou dialect do exist, but the readers do not have the dialectal environment and cannot feel them.

Examining the layout of dialect in Zhao Benfu's novels, we will notice that the dialect in Zhao Benfu's novels is not only distributed in the dialogues of the characters, but also in the names of the daily life artifacts. But once the dialogues and artifacts are shifted from the characters to the narration of the story, the language of the novel becomes Mandarin. Zhao Benfu's novels are stories that take place in Xuzhou's Feng County, so the characters' conversations do not require a literalized language, Mandarin, but his writing is clearly marked by his own anxieties. On the one hand, he tries his best to write the dialogues in the tone of the local people in order to restore the real appearance of the countryside; on the other hand, he is well aware of the importance of writing in Putonghua. On the other hand, he is aware of the importance of writing in Mandarin, which leads to the frequent appearance in his novels of sentences like "People here call dinner soup". The greater the influence of local culture and language, the more likely it is that "comments" will appear in his writing, and when the language is refined to a certain extent, a style of language that blends dialect and modern Mandarin will be formed.

When we look at the layout of dialects in Liu Renqian's novels, we will find that not only do the characters in the novels talk purely in dialects, but also the narrator basically tells the story in spoken language and dialects. Thus, the ontological status of dialect in his novels is self-evident. This makes Liu Renqian's novels organically fit together the narrator and the characters in the novels in terms of spiritual temperament, forming the organic ontology of the novels together. The folk culture and local customs are also preserved in such a narrative, and become the cultural genes in the blood of the characters, interpreting once again the cultural styles in a new historical situation of a region.

4.2 Hometown Sounds and Rhymes: Local Attachment

Liu Renqian has shown his heartfelt preference for the dialects and folk songs of the Lixiahe area. The language of his hometown constitutes the linguistic tone of Liu Renqian's literary geography of "Xianghe". Whether in his essays or novels, his references to and absorption of Xinghua folk songs, sayings, ditties, and Huaiju opera can be found everywhere. This not only makes the works present a unique living atmosphere and rich local characteristics, but also puts a distinctive hometown mark on them, which creates a kind of perplexing and fantastic atmosphere for foreigners, and produces an aesthetic strangeness effect. Whether it is the long novel "Xianghe Trilogy", or short story collection

Xianghe Chronicle and middle story collection *Xianghe Quartet*, there are a large number of Xinghua regional dialect and local language use, read more fluent, more painful. *Xianghe* was once produced by Taizhou People's Broadcasting Station as a long story serialized in the dialect of Lixiahe, and the response was strong.

It can be said that the vernacular cultural character and ethical form of rural areas in Xinghua is Liu Renqian's creative orientation, and also the foundation of his settlement, reflecting the cultural identity of the writing identity. The dialect of Xinghua is a reinforcement of the regional characteristics in the work. This intentionality makes the daily life in Liu Renqian's novels different from other places, and also enhances the artistic charm of the novels. This language, full of the regional characteristics of Xinghua, makes his works very recognizable, and makes the language and writing of a place rise to the height of art, enhancing the regional connotation of the works.

Liu Renqian himself once made this statement about dialect writing: "I have a heartfelt preference for the dialect and folk songs around Lixiahe, especially those of Xinghua. The hometown dialect, which constitutes the linguistic tone for me to create the literary geography of 'Xianghe' ..." (Liu, 2019) Here we can see another layer of significance of the use of dialect: it symbolizes a kind of sentiment of the writer and expresses a kind of cultural attachment in the writer's blood and bones.

This kind of cultural attachment is not only to his hometown, but also to the soul tutor of his hometown on the path of literature. When reading Liu Renqian's literary works, many commentators in the academic world will discuss his connection with Wang Zengqi, and he himself is happy to admit his identity as a descendant of Wang Zengqi's literature, as he says, "I love Mr. Wang Zengqi and his works with all my heart and soul" (Liu, 2023). His literary ideas contained in Liu Renqian's *Xianghe* literary world are in the same vein as Wang Zengqi's, carrying the characteristics of an innate Wang Zengqi literary birthmark.

Liu Renqian and Wang Zengqi were both members of the Lixiahe Writers' Group, and the concept of the "Lixiahe Literary School" was constructed by Liu Renqian and others at the beginning of the twentieth century, and it has gone from being unknown and questioned to gaining more and more recognition today. Wang Zengqi is the central figure of this school. Taking Wang Zengqi as the flag-bearer, it has been Liu Renqian's wish for many years to find under this banner a large number of followers who share the same creative concepts and consciously practice the common literary ideas, and to promote the Lixiahe literary genre.

In addition to his style, Liu Renqian's novel language is also deeply influenced by Wang Zengqi. In his novels, he skillfully combines the slang and colloquialisms of his hometown with modern vernacular language, and draws nourishment from classical literature and the language of the masses, to form his own "vernacular" language style which is a mix of Chinese, which is both chaste and harmonious. But this kind of vernacular is not a vernacular like plain water, but a vernacular that returns to simplicity, elegance and vulgarity. This is inseparable from Liu Renqian's deep understanding of the Lixiahe area.

Liu Renqian, like Wang Zengqi, describes the world of Xianghe in a literary language of “writing” and in authentic dialect. In Pang Yuliang’s words, “*Xianghe* has given me back the moon in the sky over my hometown, which does not have an arched tip of the tongue...” (Pang, 2021).

4.3 An Elegy: Preserving Culture

Language is not only a tool for characterization, but also the key to the formation of the narrative style of a text. For vernacular literature, the language with its unique local characteristics makes the vernacular writing of Lixiahe present a narrative style that is light and calm but without losing its humor and wit. In the daily life of Xinghua people, the nicknames that elders use for their young descendants can best reflect the emotional tension caused by the rural sound and rhythm. “We know by habit alone what things these words are associated with, because, thereafter, whenever they are spoken, they produce in the human psyche an effect similar to which particular occasions” (Edmund, 2006).

In Xinghua’s vernacular society, the elders’ nicknames for their young offspring reflect the elders’ care for their offspring, such as the names of the young boys and girls that appear abundantly in *Xianghe*. In fact, in the eyes of the elders, no matter how old the children are, even if they have long been established, in the eyes of the elders, they will always be a child, and will always be “girl” and “boy” in their mouths, especially when they return home after traveling far away from home, these nicknames with folksy sounds and rhythms will always stir up the hearts of the people. These nicknames, with their folksy sounds and rhythms, can always stir up the feeling of “fear of the near countryside” in their hearts, because these affectionate nicknames have sent the most simple feelings and deepest nostalgia to their hometowns.

Liu Renqian’s novels also feature a large number of Xinghua daily life jingles, most of these jingles are combined in a sentence-like language with folksy sounds and rhymes, and the witty language with catchy rhythms and rhymes creates a kind of light-hearted and humorous reading experience. The limerick-like jingles are light and catchy to read, and while showing the simple and plain dietary habits of the villagers, they rather bring out the sense of comfort and satisfaction in the poor life of the people, and show the calm attitude of the villagers towards life, adding a lot of humorous styles of the local characteristics to the works.

Of course, not only in the jingles, proverbs and sayings, but also in the folk songs and ballads that appear in a large number of works, which can best reflect the easy and bright narrative style. As mentioned above, whether it is dialect or folk language, or folk ballads, they all grow up from the folk soil, condensing the crystallization of the life experience and wisdom of generations of Xinghua people, and they become the writers to express the important language strategy of Xinghua rural society. But on the other hand, “the demise of language is not a biological matter, but a cultural phenomenon” (Héranger, 1999). Liu Renqian’s adherence to the creation of dialects is, to a certain extent, the preservation of the local culture of his hometown, as well as the adherence to the cultural character and national spirit embedded in it.

In addition to perseverance, dialects and local languages can also play a role of warning and reflection to express the writer's most sincere love for his hometown. *Xianghe* can easily make people feel the simplicity of Xinghua's water town in the 1960s and 1970s, and it shows readers a picture of the gentle customs of the Xinghua area. Although, in *Floating City* and *The Remaining Moon*, Liu Renqian's center of attention has shifted, and more emotions and ink are used to describe the impact of external forces on the water town society, especially the impact of incorrect money concepts, which leads to human nature fission and desire expansion, and the descendants of the water towns are caught in a predicament, struggle and watchfulness. However, while "confronting" and "exposing" in a relaxed manner, he presents a spirit of compassion and humanistic feelings in the extension of the story and the description of the characters. In *The Remnant Moon*, with the accelerated process of urbanization, the material and spiritual landscape of the society is changing day by day, which makes people afraid, panicked, and unable to adapt, and Liu Renqian's heart also generates a lot of confusion and anxiety: the countryside is gradually disappearing, the ancient customs and culture are fading away, the large-scale production replaces the individual, small-scale farming operations, the relatively closed and stable way of life has been broken, and the new conceptual system is not yet fully established. The impact and distortion of human nature are becoming more and more serious (Liu & Wen, 2021). Environmental pollution, land desertion, population mobility, soaring prices etc., which brought about drastic changes in moral concepts, value judgments, and the hearts of the characters, forcing people to start thinking, adapting, and seeking changes, accompanied by anxiety, uncertainty, and bitterness. As the end of *Xianghe Trilogy*, it describes how the descendants of Xianghe are in the earthly world, interpreting their own broken lives, which is amazing, regrettable and alarming, and describing the situation in dialect is more relevant and alarming, which better reflects Liu Renqian's compassionate feelings and spiritual vigilance.

On the level of novels written in dialect, here is another hidden worry: when the modernization process is increasingly making the Lixiahe countryside decline, when the domination of Mandarin has become an inevitable trend, rich in personalized and local characteristics of the culture is bound to wither. Looking at Liu Renqian's works in this way, it is probably not only to show the significance of landmarks, to preserve the daily life experience in history, to enhance the recognizability of his fictional tribe, but also to make efforts to preserve a culture. Liu Renqian's dialect writing is to keep a literary archive for the local culture, and at the same time to sing an endless elegy for this dying culture.

5. Conclusion

Hu Shi said: "The literature of dialect is valuable precisely because dialect is the most expressive of the human spirit. The popular vernacular is certainly far better than the ancient texts, but it is not as good as the dialect to show the speaker's expression. The characters in the ancient language are dead people; the characters in the popular vernacular are living people who do not act naturally; the characters in the

dialect are people who flow naturally” (Hu, 2020). Lin Jinlan said, “One side of the water and soil, one side of the people, the dialect is a side of the water and soil of the beauty of the word, a side of the people of the material production of spiritual production of the sum of the flavor. A writer who only speaks Mandarin is not impeded in doing anything, only when it comes to literature, the language will be tasteless and the context will not be beautiful” (Lin, 2003). The dialect in Liu Renqian’s novels is precisely the tool for his expression of the vernacular world, the divinity of the characters, life and spirituality of the people who grew up on that land, and the sign of the regional culture.

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