

# The Polyphonic Narrative of Kazuo Ishiguro's Novels——Taking "A Pale View Of Hill " as an Example

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## Abstract

*The concept of polyphonic novel was first summed up by the Soviet literary theorist Bakhtin, aiming to excavate the deep meaning of the work through the hierarchical classification of the narrative plot, and was later adopted by the Czech novelist Milan Kundera in the basis of literary practice. Combined with the carnival theory, it is further explained and changed. Based on the polyphonic novels and polyphonic narrative theories of Bakhtin, Genette and Milan Kundera, this paper analyzes the polyphony in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel "The Shadow of the Distant Mountains", and analyzes its cross-media The literary effect of narrative is deeply explored, and the meaning buried deep in the text is unearthed.*

## Keywords

*Kazuo Ishiguro, polyphonic novel, polyphonic narrative, cross-media narrative.*

## 1. Introduction

As the winner of the 2017 Nobel Prize in Literature, Kazuo Ishiguro created his own literary style with his unique narrative structure. In his works, Kazuo Ishiguro creatively uses music creation techniques such as polyphonic counterpoint and musical structure, so that it presents a beautiful texture like music, allowing readers to experience both text and music through reading. forms of art. In his debut novel, A Pale View of Hill, Kazuo Ishiguro uses memory, the flow of the unconscious, to tell the fate of the two protagonists, Etsuko and Sachiko. Weaving together, and hinting at the end of the subtle relationship between the two, which are actually one but two sides of each other, form a narrative structure that is as patchy and intricate as the polyphonic music of the Czech composer Janáček.

## 2. Polyphonic Novels and Polyphonic Narratives

Mikhail Bakhtin mainly explores the polyphony of novels from the level of narrative structure. In Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novels and Criticisms Interpretation of It, he pioneered the concept of "polyphonic (polyphonic) novels", he believes: "(polyphonic novels) have many The separate and unintegrated voices and consciousnesses, the true polyphony of distinct voices of sufficient value, is indeed characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels." [1] Compared with the single-line narrative path of traditional monologue novels, polyphonic novels are a more complex style with multiple story lines and layers intertwined. In addition, Bakhtin made an analogy between language and sound in music and art, believing that language is not an abstract symbol system but an ideology, a sound. Therefore, polyphonic novels are an organic combination of two or more narrative "voices", and each layer of discourse is influenced by the ideology behind it.

In "Light Shadows in the Far Mountains", the author lays out two intertwined narrative lines. The same character uses the first person "I" to start the story of Yuezi, and the third person "Sachiko" to start another story line. It is also from the perspective of the first person to examine the story line of "Sachiko". The division of personal pronouns reflects the distinction

of characters, allowing readers to have a clear perspective when reading, making the narrative structure of the novel as a whole clear and patchy, laying the groundwork for the fog of memories at the end. It deeply embodies what Bakhtin said about the subjectivity, independence and dialogue of the characters, that is, in the structure of the work, the protagonist's discourse has a special independence, it seems to be parallel to the author's discourse, and in a unique way. The author's words are combined with the equally worthy voices of the other protagonists [2]

Gerard Genette called the variation of narrative style caused by the shift of narrative viewpoints as "polyphony". Variation is obviously different from Pap's norm of polyphony. Genette analyzes the different aggregation methods of narrative perspectives in Proust's novels, pointing out that Platts "uses the three aggregation methods simultaneously without hesitation, as if unnoticed, and arbitrarily transfers from the consciousness of the protagonist to the narrator. This triple narrative standpoint cannot be compared with the pure omniscience of the classical novel." Genette also clearly pointed out that the multiple aggregation of "polyphonic" used in Proust's "Reminiscence of the Time Is Like Water" may have been deeply influenced by the "Spring" composed by the Russian composer Stravinsky at that time. Influenced by "Sacrificial", the polyphonic style created by the latter was quite popular at that time. [3] Therefore, compared with Bakhtin, Genette's definition of polyphony is more from the narrative perspective of the novel, and the stratification of the consciousness flow of the characters in the novel is also regarded as one of the manifestations of polyphony in the novel. The definition fits well with the booming stream-of-consciousness novels at that time, and in "The Shadow of the Far Mountain", Kazuo Ishiguro completed the transformation of the novel's perspective through the constant flashback and flow of the character's consciousness between memory and reality. , thus showing the polyphony of the novel.

The Czech novelist Milan Kundera's research on polyphonic narrative comes from his many years of literary creation experience. The word "polyphony" occupies an extremely crucial position in the overall structure of Kundera's novel poetics. "Polyphonic" is not only a stylistic term, acting as the formal prototype and structural factor of Kundera's novel poetics; but also as a methodological concept, it dominates the narrative position and discourse strategy of Kundera's novel poetics. It fundamentally characterizes the cultural spirit of Kundera's novel poetics and dialogue. [3] Therefore, different from Bakhtin's polyphonic structure, Kundera's polyphonic narration mainly starts from the polyphony of characters to present the complex multi-faceted and split nature of modern people. The heroines Etsuko and Sachiko in "Light Shadows in the Far Mountains" are also vividly reflected. Kazuo Ishiguro uses memory as a clue to use the ambiguity of consciousness to shape polyphonic characters, and through the perspective of an unbelievable bystander, he outlines the outlines of the characters from the side, showing the post-war trauma in Japan, but also reflects the characters. Contradiction and complexity.

### **3. Contradictions between the Other and the Self: The Polyphony of Characters**

From the names of the protagonists "Etsuko" and "Sachiko" in the novel, it can be seen that the author has given clear enough hints about the identity fog of the two from the beginning, but when translating, most current translations choose to use "悦子"(meaning happy in Chinese) The transliteration into "幸子"(meaning luck in Chinese) also conceals the hint of the name and deprives readers of the opportunity to feel this fog of identity. The protagonist is a woman who immigrated to the UK from Japan after World War II. From the very beginning, the whole novel is filled with a strong atmosphere of trauma, but at the beginning of the novel,

the author does not directly explain the identity of the narrator "I", but through triggering The event of Keiko's death brought back memories of "I", and the name "Keiko" is undoubtedly full of strong oriental exoticism in the Western context, so the sudden appearance of such a name has to make readers feel wrong. All kinds of guesses and doubts about the identity of the characters, and through this guessing, the imaginative relationship about the characters in the novel is constructed.

In terms of narrative space, Kazuo Ishiguro skillfully used the contradiction between memory and reality to reflect the polyphony of the ideology behind the characters. "Memories, I have found, can be unreliable things; they are often greatly distorted by the environment in which you recall." [4] Although Etsuko has a dual identity of protagonist and narrator, in her memories, it is often found that due to the Distorted impressions of events resulting from the subjectivity of characters. For example, in the novel, Etsuko always tends to portray herself as a "good wife" who has been traumatized by war but still follows traditional Japanese values, a woman who is respected in Japanese society; but portrays Sachiko as a rebellious family. And Japanese society's strict moral requirements for women, insisting on marrying the drunken American soldier Frank, who is a "bad woman" who pursues Western values, but in fact these two are two sides differentiated from a person's personality. Therefore, the author creates this self-alienation contradiction by letting the character "Sachiko" create an alien for himself in his memory, which not only fully demonstrates the difference in values between the East and the West, but also puts the contradiction of this difference into perspective. Presented in the monologue of an individual character, it reflects the complexity of the character, makes the narrative level of the novel more distinct, and highlights the polyphony of the novel.

Similar to the character setting of Etsuko, Kazuo Ishiguro also set another name and identity for Keiko, that is, Sachiko's daughter, Mariko, combined with his own experience of being born in Nagasaki but growing up in England, he externalized these experiences of his own. For the image of Keiko, Keiko's tragedy is used to present the oriental tragedy kidnapped by Western capitalist ideology. Keiko was born in Japan and wanted to have a home in Japan, but was brought to England by Etsuko and became an outlier under Western ideology. In the novel, Keiko's experience is similar to the author's own experience. As a witness and witness of the social changes in Japan after World War II, she was forced to accept the kidnapping of Western ideology and had to follow her mother to the UK. The incompatibility of the environment and the collision of ideology eventually led to the tragedy of her untimely death. In this way, the author uses Keiko's death as the embodiment of his own unconsciousness, connecting the reality and the fictional world in an intricate manner, so that her death and another daughter, Nikki, who grew up under Western ideology, formed the sharp contrast also hints at the development trend of Japan's postwar ideology being kidnapped by the West, reflecting the ambiguity of the interweaving of reality and fiction.

In addition, the setting of the characters of Jiro and Mr. Ogata also reflects the polyphony of the characters in the novel. As Etsuko's husband, Jiro, on the one hand, abides by the Japanese tradition of men leading outside and women leading inside, and on the other hand, he revises the political concept of Japanese militarism represented by Mr. Ogata. On the other hand, Mr. Ogata, he is not only a spokesperson for militarism, but also an educator who conveys this kind of thought. It can be said that it is because of the help of his generation that militarism is rampant in Japan. In the novel, Mr. Ogata assumes the role of an unreliable narrator. Even if the reader suspects that the narrator has concealed the facts, his conscious awareness of his own shortcomings can often capture the sympathy of the reader, making his concealment seem excusable [5]. His words often reveal a strong nostalgic atmosphere for the era of militarism, and as an individual brainwashed by militaristic ideology, he is unable to realize

that his educational behavior is poisoning the next generation, but thinks that his actions are the orthodoxy that follows the traditional Japanese ideology. As the backbone of the post-war construction, Jiro chose to accept the fusion of capitalist ideology, become a company employee and integrate into Japan's rising consumer culture. From the dialogue between Jiro and his father, it is not difficult to find that the author borrows the characters to convey the reflection of the young generation of post-war Japan on the crimes committed by militarism.

#### **4. The flow of imagery—the polytonal analysis of imagery**

The recurring images in the novel are also polyphonic, and the most typical ones are the rivers, ghosts, and the white statues in the Peace Park. The river imagery first hints at the unconscious flow of Kazuo Ishiguro himself in the novel, which is related to his childhood experiences. Kazuo Ishiguro lived in Nagasaki with his grandfather as a child, and next to his grandfather's house was a river called the Nakajima River. This river is of great significance to the Nagasaki people who have experienced the atomic bombing, because the original target of the atomic bomb was on the Tokiwa Bridge on the Nakajima River [6], and this river also fits the description of Etsuko at the beginning of the novel. The novel uses the river as the introduction as the beginning of the protagonist's memory, and at the same time it is a metaphor for the beginning of the flow of consciousness in the novel. This narrative structure not only reflects the literary nature of the novel, but also presents the beauty of music, so that the words are like the notes of the prelude. Step into a deeper flow of consciousness. The imitation and reference of literature to music can make us more deeply appreciate how literature reflects the ups and downs of emotions, the tremors of the soul and the self-questioning of the soul at the edge of abstraction and concreteness. [7] Kazuo Ishiguro uses words to weave the plot of the novel. It has a texture that flows like music, allowing readers to explore the emotional awareness of the characters in the vague words.

Second, memory is Kazuo Ishiguro's preferred motif, which is involved in almost all of his works. With the help of a subtle retrospective narrative, the organic relationship between memory and forgetting, hallucinations, and imagination is established, and the texture of spiritual space is jointly displayed [8]. In the novel, Mariko has been seeing a woman repeatedly by the river. Various rumors in the text also suggest that a woman once drowned her child in order to escape on the Nakajima River, and it is very likely that Mariko saw it with his own eyes while playing by the river. The whole process of her drowning the child. The setting of this plot also complements the drowning of Mariko's kitten after Wen Zuozhizi, which strengthens the writing of the trauma narrative in the novel, and also stimulates readers' various imaginations about the connection between Sachiko and ghosts, in the fictional reality and memory. The constant repetition also reflects the polyphony in the narrative space of the novel.

The white statue in the Peace Park is also an important image in the novel. It appears in the memory near the end of the article. That day, Etsuko and Mr. Ogata went to visit the old acquaintance before the war. Passing by the park, they saw a white statue. This statue was meant to commemorate the war, but it looked so horrible and ugly in the eyes of the protagonist "I". Hutchison believes: "Human perception can be divided into external perception and internal perception. The former is the recognition of sound and color, and the latter is the recognition of moral standards of good and evil, and of beauty and ugliness at the artistic level. The latter is based on the former." (Nakamura Yujiro 2007: 217) The projection of the statue in the heart of "I" is the inner perception aroused by the external world, which is sublimated into the good and evil, the beauty of the statue's connotation Judgment with Ugly [9]. "I" think the statue is ugly, lacks solemnity, and even "like a policeman directing traffic" because the war has left a deep shadow in "my" memory, and the white color of the statue and

the shadow caused by the war have formed a strong In addition, the metaphor of "police" implies that the author stands in the East and reveals his strong dissatisfaction with the United States, which is known as the "world police", and the hegemonic behavior carried out by Japan. As a result, the metaphor of the white statue has fulfilled its dual mission, namely, conveying the author's anti-war intention while representing the psychological activities of the protagonist, and has become an indispensable and important image in the overall polyphonic narrative structure of the novel.

## 5. Conclusion——Thinking about the innovation of novel form

Susan Sontag, in "Against Interpretation," has provided insights into the development of the novel, arguing that "what the novel lacks, and what it must be if it is to continue to be a serious art form in general (rather than in part), What it has is its enduring distance from those assumptions of the nineteenth century." [10] Thus, the polyphonic novel, as an innovation in the form and structure of the novel, became the focus of novel studies in the twentieth century, and its innovation lies in the novel Through the structural arrangement of characters, images and plots, the artist makes the works present a texture that flows like music, and becomes a serious art form that can stimulate the emotions shared by human beings like music, rather than kitsch literature only for public entertainment. Therefore, although polyphonic novels are essentially an imitation of the effect of music and art, they have innovated novels in terms of form, structure, and connotation, highlighting the artistry of novels, and making novels rise from popular culture for public entertainment to literature and art The height of the works and the discovery of polyphony also force literary critics to re-examine and dig out the excellent works with polyphonic characteristics in classical novels, so that the classical novels can be revived as art in contemporary times.

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