

## **Realistic Values of Xu Gang's Ecological Reportage: *Woodcutter, wake up!***

SENG Yan Ping, SENG Yan Chuan and TEOH Hooi See  
Department of Chinese Studies  
University of Malaya

### **Abstract**

In this new era, the rise of ecological reportage in China, especially its emergence and development, is not being brought about accidentally, it rather consists of profound practical background and ideological foundation. The ecological crisis due to industrial modernization and civilization, plays the most powerful external role in the emerging of ecological reportage. In this field, Xu Gang (1945-) is undoubtedly the pioneer, who has been strenuously creating ecological reportage for more than two decades. By having magnificent ecological vision and strong sense of responsibility towards society, he has created *Woodcutter, wake up!* (伐木者，醒来！, 1988), *Shouwang jiyuan* (守望家园 Watching Homeland, 1997), *Diqiu chuan* (地球传 The Earth, 1999), *Zhangjiang chuan* (长江传 The Yangtze River, 2000), *Da shanshui* (大山水 Big Landscape, 2007), etc. His works have led readers to a way to protect and take care of the ecology with their realistic criticism and consciousness of suffering. There are many aspects of values in the Xu Gang's ecological reportage. This paper aims to illustrate the realistic values in Xu Gang's famous work *Woodcutter, wake up!* This is one of his representative works, after published it received well acclaim, and led the creation and direction of Chinese Contemporary Ecological Reportage. It not only let Chinese intellectuals shocked, but also directly affects the subsequent Chinese forestry policy. Therefore, this paper focuses on this work.

**Keywords:** Xu Gang, ecological reportage, realistic value, ecocriticism, reality orientation

## **Nilai Realistik Reportage Ekologi Xu Gang: *Pemotong kayu, bangun!***

SENG Yan Ping, SENG Yan Chuan and TEOH Hooi See  
Jabatan Pengajian Tionghoa  
Universiti Malaya

### **Abstrak**

Dalam era baharu ini, kebangkitan reportage (pelaporan) ekologi di China, terutamanya kemunculan dan perkembangannya, tidak dibawa secara tidak sengaja, tetapi terdiri daripada latar belakang praktikal yang mendalam dan berasaskan ideologi. Krisis ekologi yang disebabkan oleh pemodenan perindustrian dan tamadun memainkan peranan luaran yang paling kuat dalam merangsang kemunculan reportage ekologi. Dalam bidang ini, Xu Gang (1945-) merupakan perintis tanpa pertikaian lantaran beliau telah mencipta reportage-reportage ekologi selama lebih dari dua dekad. Dengan mempunyai visi ekologi yang kental dan rasa tanggungjawab yang tinggi terhadap masyarakat, beliau telah mencipta *Pemotong kayu, bangun!* (伐木者, 醒来, 1988), *Shouwang jiyuan* (守望家园 Menjaga Tanah Air, 1997), *Diqiu chuan* (地球传 Bumi, 1999), *Zhangjiang chuan* (长江传 Sungai Yangtze, 2000), *Da shanshui* (大山水 Landskap Besar, 2007), dan lain-lain. Karya-karya beliau telah membawa pembaca untuk melindungi dan menjaga ekologi melalui kelahiran kritikan realistik dan kesedaran penderitaan. Terdapat banyak aspek nilai dalam reportage ekologi Xu Gang. Kertas penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan nilai-nilai realistik dalam *Pemotong kayu, bangun!* Ini adalah salah satu karya utamanya, selepas diterbitkannya ia mendapat pujian yang baik. Karya ini merintis penciptaan dan hala tuju penulisan Reportage Ekologi kontemporari Cina. Ia bukan sahaja mengejutkan para cendekiawan Cina tetapi juga mempengaruhi dasar kehutanan China secara langsung. Oleh itu, kertas kerja ini memberi tumpuan kepada karya ciptaan reportage Xu Gang tersebut.

**Kata kunci:** Xu Gang, reportage ekologi, nilai realistik, eko-kritisisme, orientasi realiti

## 1 Introduction

In this new era, the rise of ecological reportage in China, its emergence and development is not being created accidentally it rather consists of profound practical background and ideological foundation. The ecological crisis which caused by industrial modernization and civilization, play the most powerful external role in the emerging of ecological reportage. Since the beginning of industrialization, the strained relationship between man and nature has started to show off, especially in the late 20th century. Series of acid rain, nuclear pollution, ozone hole and desertification phenomenon has occurred and become a huge threat to human's living. Many scholars unanimously declared that the earth is becoming progressively difficult for humans to live as the world is facing an unprecedented ecological disaster crisis.

The ecological situation in China is a serious issue. Although China has entered the era of industrialization and urbanization since 1980s after the reformation of economy in country, such belated industrial expansion and rapid urbanization, did not reduce the natural environment pollution and ecological destruction. According to the survey of the Ecological Environment Sciences Research Center, Chinese Academy of Sciences, the current status of China's ecological can be summarized as:

“Congenial deficiencies, lack of superiority, vandalism, acquired disorders; partial improvement, the overall deterioration; governance capacity lags far behind the rate of destruction, environment quality deteriorating. It has become the largest and most extensive coverage area involving and most serious consequences of ecological destruction and environmental pollution in China's history. “(Gong, 2003, p. 103)

Since new era, Ecological reportage has shown a steady development process. It has gone through the periods from prosperity to stable development, to overall transition in the creativity and has become an eye-catching literary phenomenon in the contemporary literary world. Ecological reportage written by intellectuals and reporters such as Sha Qing (沙青), Xu Gang (徐刚), Wang Zhiyuan (王志苑), Li Qingsong (李青松), Zhe Fu (哲夫), Chen Guidi (陈贵迪), etc. Moreover, there is the rise of “Chinese eco-journalism” in recent years. The *Zhongguo huanjing bao* (中国环境报China Environmental News) published its first edition in 1984, and national newspapers such as the *Renmin ribao* (人民日报People's Daily) or the *Zhongguo qingnian bao* (中国青年报China Youth Daily) have paid higher attention to environmental issues eventually. (Zhang, 2007, p. 13) In 1991, Chinese writers found Huanjing wenxue yanjiuhui (环境文学研究会Society of Environmental Literature) has the intention toward ecological degradation and wish to develop the genre environment literature in China (Thornber, 2012, p. 53). Among the ecological reportage writers, Xu Gang, who has been engaged in literary reportage for the longest time, has contributed the greatest impact and achievement among the ecological writers in China.

## 2 Xu Gang's Works and Contributions

Born in 1945, Xu Gang was raised in a farmer family at Chongming Island, China, which located at northern of Shanghai City. Upon graduated from Peking University, he worked as an editor with *People's Daily* and also held posts as deputy director of editorial department of *Zhongguo zuojia* (中国作家 Chinese Writers), a prestigious literary periodical, and deputy editor-in-chief of *Xiandai ren bao* (现代人报 Modern Newspaper). He has been producing many poems and proeses since 1963 which then become famous.

He then started to write literary reportage, focused on the areas of ecological environment and thinking, reporting since 1987. His famous literary reportages are *Woodcutter, wake up!* (伐木者醒来! , 1988), *Shouwang jiyuan* (守望家园 Watching Homeland, 1997), *Diqiu chuan* (地球传 The Earth, 1999), *Zhangjiang chuan* (长江传 The Yangtze River, 2000), *Da shanshui* (大山水 Big Landscape, 2007), etc. Xu Gang was elected as the World's Top 500 Major Issue Writer. His works have been awarded the China Book Award (中国图书奖) and 1<sup>st</sup> Xu Chi Reportage Prize (徐迟报告文学奖) in 2001 and the 1<sup>st</sup> Chinese Environmental Literary Award (中国环境文学奖) in 2002. His work "Guo Nan" (国难 National Calamity, 2003) was awarded the 4<sup>th</sup> Bing Xin Literary Award (冰心文学奖) in year 2004. These awards are recognition to Xu Gang on his outstanding achievement and contributions to Chinese Ecological Reportage. His commitment and dedication to Chinese ecological reportage is well-deserved for respect and appreciation.

Although there is research about ecological reportage by Xu Gang, most of the works are surrounded by the expansion of theme, ecology awareness and so on. Some are general interpretations of the content, which are sporadic about Xu Gang's ecological literature research and styles characteristics.

These studies include "Lvse lunli de fanghaozhe--shiren Xu Gang 'Famuzhe xinglai' de shengtai jiedu" (绿色伦理的放号者--诗人徐刚《伐木者，醒来的生态解读》 Green Ethics Awakener -- The Ecological Interpretation of the Poet Xu Gang's Woodcutter wake up!, 2000) by Ren Xiuqin (任秀芹), "Xu Gang yu shengtai baogao wenxue" (徐刚与生态报告文学 Xu Gang and Ecological Reportage, 2008) by Zeng Ying (曾莹), "Xu Gang sanwen de huanjing yishi yanjiu yanjiu" (徐刚散文的环境意识研究 A Study on Environmental Consciousness of Xu Gang's Prose, 2011) Cao Shulei (曹淑雷) and "Xinshiqi shengtai wenxue yanjiu—yi Xu Gang, Wei An, Chi Zijian wei ge'an yanjiu" (新时期生态文学研究——以徐刚、苇岸、迟子建为个案研究 On Chinese Eco-literature in the 1980s – Take Xu Gang, Wei An and Chi Zijian as Study Cases, 2007) by Shi Yuanming (史元明), etc. At present, the study of ecological reportage tends to focus on subject matter or subject analysis, there is little research on its realistic value and artistic dimension.

This paper explores the realistic values of Xu Gang's ecological reportage through an analysis of his ecological reportage "*Woodcutter, wake up!*". Written in 1987, it was originally published in the second issue of the 1988 edition of *Xin guan cha* (新观察 New Observer), a popular biweekly magazine of national circulation, where it

received considerable attention. *Woodcutter, wake up!* is considered the first reportage on environmental issues, and the first piece of nature writing, in modern China (Sullivan, 2014). In the nine chapters of reportage, *Woodcutter, wake up!*, the author, from different levels and perspectives, discusses the deteriorating ecological situations in China that caused by deforestation. *Woodcutter* is repeatedly cited as amongst the most influential examples of Chinese ecological literature in general (Thornber, 2012, p. 52; Yang & Zeng, 2010, p. 120).

Later, in 1997, a collection of Xu Gang's ecological reportages was published by the Jilin People's Publishing House, amongst which *Woodcutter* was the first and also the title giving reportage. This volume is part of a "Lvse jingdian wenku" (绿色经典文库 Green Classics Library) published by the same company that comprises mostly important Western environmental books in Chinese translation, such as Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), or *The Limits of Growth* (commissioned by the Club of Rome in 1972). Among the eleven titles featured in the 1997 collection, Xu Gang's *Woodcutter* is one of the only three volumes from Chinese authors.<sup>1</sup>

The cultural connotation of Xu Gang's ecological reportage has achieved and affirmed its significant role in the field of literature, in contemporary society, this may initiate certain relevant thinking. In this paper, Xu Gang's ecological reportage as study object, to explore the realistic value of ecological literature. Besides, this paper also studies the value and the impact of the ecological reportage, to analyze and discuss the strong desire of the author for a harmonious society.

### 3 Xu Gang's Ecological Reportage Realistic Values

The ecological literature after twenty years of accumulation has become influential in the field of Chinese literature. Some excellent authors based on the high sense of responsibility towards the ecological crisis disclosure and the social responsibility. They joined in the tide of ecological literature, and achieved good results. In the past twenty years, China's ecological literature has achieved fruitful results, but it cannot be denied that there are some problems. Throughout the ecological literary works, no matter what kind of style, the themes are mainly concentrated in the depletion of water resources, deforestation, hunting wild animals, natural disasters, etc. (Zeng, 2008, p. 8).

The creations of ecological literature put forward a very high demand for the theme of the author's works, only with a unique vision. One of the reasons that Xu Gang stands out among the ecological writers is because of his highly inventive themes. Xu

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<sup>1</sup> The two other works are *Women xuyao yichang geming* (我们需要一场变革 We need a Transformation, 1997) by Qu Geping (曲格平, 1930-) and *Xin renkou lun* (新人口论 New Population Theory, 1997) by Ma Yinchu (马寅初, 1882-1982). These two works are also ecological reportage (Wu, 2012, p. 15).

Gang's works like *Woodcutter wake up!* and others cover all aspects of ecological crisis. In the context, he continuously inquires the deep reasons behind the ecological crisis, and expresses his view of sustainable ecological development and the ideal pursuit. By sharp ecological criticism, Xu Gang's ecological literary works have shown the reexamine of the deep consciousness and the relationship between man and nature. For the theme, his works break through the parochialism traditional ecological literary theme, reflects the realistic value of ecological literature.

### **(1) Sharp Eco-cultural Criticism and Strong Reality Orientation**

The significance of ecological literature, in short, is to explore the social causes of ecological crisis. What is the value pursuit of ecological literature? It is a question of human being's ecological crisis. It is man's ecological responsibility and it is social cultural obligation of the people (Zhang & Yi, 2009, p. 63). The ecological literature has made a sharp criticism on destruction of the natural process of civilization and progress. In fact, if we want to study human and nature, it cannot be departed from the reality of the social development model, our life style has affected by the human's world view and values. Therefor ecological authors' voices were becoming more assertive, as they now consciously began to produce ecological literature (Wang, 2008, p. 253).

American ecological literary critic and theorist Patrick D. Murphy (1951-), in his book *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* provided a wide ranging discussion of contemporary literature and cultural phenomena through the lens of ecological literary criticism. In particular, he looks at ecology reportage, as well as actual disasters and disaster scenarios. According to his theory, ecocritical explorations in literary and cultural studies are a timely contribution to ecological literary criticism which provides an insightful look into how we represent our relationship with the environment (Murphy, 2002, p. 28).

In 1988, after receiving unprecedented success of *Woodcutter, wake up!*, Xu Gang stands as a writer of ecological literature in the eyes of people. In the context, he severely criticized benighted woodcutter and warned that:

Human's ingenuity and insatiably and their activities caused destruction of nature has become more and more enormous. Among all, deforestation denudation and destruction of natural vegetation are considered the most serious and longest lasting (Xu, 1997, p. 2).

The existence of *Woodcutter, wake up!*, in Chinese ecological literature can be treated as China's *Silent Spring*<sup>2</sup>, an American ecological literature by Rachel Carson

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<sup>2</sup> *Silent Spring* is an environmental science book by Rachel Carson (1907-1964). In the late 1950s, Carson turned her attention to conservation; especially environmental problems that she believed were caused by synthetic pesticides. The result was *Silent Spring* (1962), which brought environmental concerns to the American public.

(Zhang & Liu, 2005). Both bring the theme of man and nature to the people in ecological environmental context that lead people begin to think about their relationship with nature for the first time. Since then, Xu Gang began to explore the long journey of ecological literature, successively launched “Zhongguo fengshaxian” (中国风沙线China Sand Line, 1994), “Lvse Xuanyan” (绿色宣言Green Manifesto, 1995), *Shouwang jiyuan* (守望家园Watching Home, 1997), *Zhangjiang zhuan* (长江传The Yangtze River, 2000) and other influential works in the field of ecological literature mainly, ecological reportage.

Ecological crisis is a global proposition that included the forest destruction, water pollution, over exploitation of mineral resources and so on. One of the roles of forest is protecting people from flood water, strong wind and sand storm. However, on May 6<sup>th</sup> 1987, a wildfire broke out in the forests of Daxing'anling (大兴安岭) prefecture in Heilongjiang Province, Northeast China. The fire burned out the most primitive wealth in the northeast which was the treasure left by the ancestors. How can you be indifferent? How can you not love dearly?

Human intelligence is proportional to their destruction of nature. While science and technology are progressing, nature is being destroyed. The destruction of natural vegetation is only the tip of the iceberg of the entire destruction by human:

China's forest area is 1 billion 729 million acres, coverage is 12%, this is the statistics before the Greater Daxing'anling's fire. Our forests compared with the increasingly poor of the world's forests, is even scarcer, and the rate of decrease is more alarming! (Xu, 1997, p. 3)

In *Woodcutter!* Xu Gang uses contrast, a literature rhetoric method, putting two mountains together and compares Wuyishan (武夷山Wuyi Mountain) and Tianmushan (天目山Tianmu Mountain) tells us the different fate of the two mountains due to different attitudes towards ecological protection.

The author's intent is to acquire a first-hand impression of the environmental situation on the ground after having followed the Daxing'anling news coverage with increasing frustration. Wuyishan is famous mountain located in Fujian province of China and also famous for representing an aesthetic ideal often emulated in Chinese traditional landscape painting: Green trees cling to bizarre rock formations, and with the passing of the centuries the mountain slopes have become covered with a net of tangled roots which protect it from erosion through wind and water. But, as Xu Gang informs the reader, “the discrepancy between the imagined and the real [Wuyishan] is too great” (Xu, 1997, p. 4): The forests have almost completely fallen prey to extensive logging: Dawang feng (大王峰King's Peak), the crown of the mountain range which used to boast “Gumu cantian” (古木参天old trees that reach up to heaven) (Xu, 1997, p. 6) and impenetrable brush that provided a haven for bird life, has been nearly stripped of any forest cover:

Until 1974, all but 300 trees had been cut down, which might be a small number, but it was still enough to somewhat cover King's Peak and not make it seem too naked. But now, at this late hour, the axes have cut away another 298 of them, and all that remains are but two trees (Xu, 1997, p. 6).

Just when the readers increasingly distressed, Xu Gang took them to his second destination, Tianmu Mountain, because the people there love the mountains as love their own lives, so this is like another world, another scene where a landscape with flowers and birds, animals and humans live harmoniously in a beautiful paradise:

The oldest members of forest family like pine, fir, ginko who have been live in Tianmu Mountain for millions years are still full of vigour; between the rocks, there are always birds and beasts appear here and there, but they seem to be little wariness about the human who live there.

Inside the dense trees and bamboos, there are countless herbs and elixir that can cure all kinds of diseases which can make people longevity..... (Xu, 1997, p. 19)

The Mountain is largely intact, the region's subtropical primeval forest unspoilt. The striking contrast piques the author's curiosity, as he starts to investigate the causes: It is not as if, as Xu Gang remarks, "the local peasants at Tianmushan do not own axes, and do not know how to cut trees" (Xu, 1997, p. 25).

Xu Gang exposes a lot about the destruction over forest resources throughout the nation, including lush forest into barren end wilderness, illegal logging becomes collective behaviour, forests have been cut down to cultivate Tieguanyin tea tree (铁观音茶树)..... Because nature can't talk, it suffers endless bullying and humiliation from human without scruple. There is such a saying that when die in silence, it means exploded in silence. Obviously, nature chooses the latter and is ruthless.

Forest, as most complicated and most important part in terrestrial ecosystem, the green prosperity of life on earth is the symbol of prosperity; it is the most important hub for the exchange of Natural substance and energy. It is the seasons and weather "control room", this "control room" is now has thousands of disease holes precariously! (Xu, 1997, p. 2)

The constant disappearance of forest resources confirms Xu Gang's worries, and how do humans repay the nature for nurturing them? To rob wildly and endlessly. Can such an act not be heartbreaking? These behaviours just like a grown child keep squeezing his aging mother without knowing her inability to accept any more squeezes.

Obviously, due to the vanity and shameful lusts, illegal hunting has caused a serious damage to the ecological system which also aroused the conflict between human and nature. This proves that the starter of ecological crisis is human being, no wonder Xu Gang said "ones will be led to swift perish if choose to enjoy luxury and be exceeded on demand" (Xu, 1997, p. 18).

British historian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) pointed out that human nature is greedy, and greed leads to disaster if it is not restrained. He thinks that people who have become addicts to greed tend to take a short-term view, "Modern man has been induced to overcome traditional scruples about giving free rein to human greed by a doctrine that has made greed look respectable. The unleashing of greed by this doctrine has been



the psychological driving force behind the modern way of life in the technologically “developed” countries” (Lipp, 1980, p. 86).

The starting point of Xu Gang’s ecological literature is the critique of the ecological crisis. After digging into the causes of the ecological crisis, Xu Gang pointed to the end of the modern civilization. Different from other modern civilization criticizes writer, Xu Gang is not on agricultural civilization stance criticizing industrial civilization, but based on the reality, therefore, his criticism has strong reality orientation, profound reflection on modern civilization.

When calculating the development cost of material civilization, human always seem to be short-sighted. People are happy with material wealth brought by the development of science and technology, but ignore the damage of modern civilization to the environment. Could this type gain and losses of wealth can be weighed? If human can recalculate the cost of economic development with the wisdom eye, try to compare the wealth growth with the environmental destruction, resources loss and deterioration of living environment, it is obvious to know which is more important.

Strong reality orientation makes Xu Gang’s works full of dignified sense of reality. For example, when he writes about the corruption of leading cadres of Wuyishan, the reckless deforestation, neglected duty and even embezzlement make him lamented “on the one hand is reckless deforestation, on the other hand is embezzlement, is there any salvation for Wuyishan?” (Xu, 1997, p. 10). Other examples, including the construction cemeteries in Wenzhou (温州), the burning mountain on Hainan Island (海南岛), the looting of state farm at Nandan Guangxi (广西南丹) and so on. All of these are pointing to the spearhead of the savage behaviour in civilization society by humans. The ecological literature works of Xu Gang are out of the ordinary, because he is not just staying in the level of news nature or documental features, but to continue find the social roots behind ecological crisis and constantly tortures on human thinking.

In *Woodcutter*, Xu Gang pointed out that the development of modern material civilization has penetrated into every cell of the country, the temptation of material growing people’s desire. The desire of human has been stirred up; someday it would become a huge exploitation of natural resources uncontrollably.

We cannot always have everything that we wanted, so people will be suffered when ones need to make a choice. However, when humans need to choose between the nature and the money, they seem not to be hesitated to choose the former. With the fact of the deforestation among Zhejiang (浙江), Wenzhou (温州), Heilongjiang (黑龙江) and other places, Xu Gang pointed out that the natural ecological imbalance is the consequence caused by deforestation. He condemned the bureaucracy illegal behaviour, called on the government to improve ecological awareness, and stop the deforestation behaviour resolutely.

The real spirit of ecological literature is to face the reality, criticizing the reality, if the contexts only state some of the data and figures, this type of ecological literature loss

its deep meaning. Xu Gang's works are the most representative in the field of ecological literature. Xu Gang constantly digging the story behind the ecological crisis carries out sharp criticism and reflection. Of course, he does not want to return to the agricultural era, but for the reality of the sustainable development of mankind to find a way out. Therefore, his work has a strong reality orientation.

## (2) Ecological Responsibility and Early Warning Thought

In addition to the sharp social criticism, Xu Gang's ecological literature has a deep misery consciousness of crisis. He writes, "When the new technology revolution Pandora box opened its loss of control, human development and conquest of the nature, at the same time, they are violating their own survival base and predatory descendants, the survival of mankind to survive the whole life cycle is shrinking, natural disasters will unprecedented increase and tend to vicious, modern and future people's living space will be the victory of the desert"(Xu, 1997, p. 2). Literati always worried about the country and people, they worry about the ignorance of people, the underdevelopment of technique and culture. However, all of these are not as much as the worry of the global ecological, because this ultimate concern is about the situation of homeless for human.

Xu Gang engaged in ecological literature more than 20 years, despite all kinds of squeezing and suppressing, but with the love toward ecological homeland, he has always been a firm believer and has written a series of popular articles. His articles have sharp criticism of reality, and more about the ecological deterioration with an infinite sorrow. Li Bingyin (李炳银, 1950-) has commented on Xu Gang: "For the crisis confronted by the homeland of human, the writer immerses in a complex emotion, he feels of pain, fear, worry, anxiety, helplessness but also hope. Hence, an image of broad minded thinker has been constituted, lots of bystander touched and moved by this existence. Here, the sincere talk and guardian are most able to touch the enthusiasm emotion of people" (Li, 2003, p. 215).

Xu Gang took *Woodcutter, wake up!* as the starting point, to start his ecological literature creation for twenty years. He travelled all over the well-known mountains and rivers, visited different rivers and lakes, and looked for desert and forest. During the process, he witnessed the increase of desertification, the almost dried up rivers, and the more and more deforestation, these experiences brought him a huge shock:

Dawang feng (大王峰) can be said as the first peak of Wuyi (武夷), according to historical records, rocks on Dawang feng once had been staked together which make no road for others to pass through; there is bushy forest area and swarm of birds. More valuable is the towering old trees on the peak and the green plants had covered the land. However, these old trees are unable to escape from the calamity (Xu, 1997, p. 6).

View of Xu Gang from the mountains and rivers to flowers and trees, every species in the human's homeland are being concerned and worried. The compassionate feeling makes his articles reflect deep misery consciousness.

Although many people think that the attribute of ecological literature is critical, but a dignified consciousness always reflected from Xu Gang critique toward the reality. His articles have shown a deep misery consciousness of ecology, environmental protection, civilization and vicissitudes of nation. When comes to the subject of land desertification, he said with worried: “humans are using various means to create the tragedy of desertification, this is not just digging their own grave, but also cruelty enough to bury their next generation!” (Xu, 1997, p. 40). In order to arouse the human sense of responsible towards environmental protection and their mission sense, Xu Gang uses the strongest feeling to cry out the worry about ecology to the readers.

His works raised a strong resonance in the readers. The intention to awake the ecological awareness of the public by ecological literature has received a good feedback, which is the charm of literary works. Li Bing Yin made a precise description about the meaning of literature for the readers:

When understanding and obeying is the aims of literature to ask from people, then literature is kind of propaganda; when people imperceptibly influenced and inducted by literature and it makes people become more and more pure and beautiful, then literature is an art of persuasion; when literature is undergoing a harsh anatomy of human, to implement sort of protection and cultivation in human life, this literature is actually about the spirit of guardian for the human's homeland, hence, for human the literature has a direct and profoundly meaning and value (Li, 2003, p. 217).

Today, when people are busy looking for the higher social position and richer wealth, whereas an alternative pathway with no benefit returns is chosen by Xu Gang. He deeply concerns for the land which belong to the people and enthusiastically call for the human's homeland. This is unable from not letting us to have an admiration for the writer.

Ecological warning is another attribute of ecological literature. In fact, as early as in ancient times, the negative influence of material civilization has been paid attention by humans. With Mencius (孟子) words: “According to the season, get into the mountains with an axe to cut down trees, then the wood will be inexhaustible” (Tay, 2008, p. 32), which means excluding of the deforestation, it is allowed to cut down trees in a certain period of time, so the trees will be inexhaustible. In fact, these ideas of the ancients are a kind of ecological warning, if to put it in the context of today's ecology. Nowadays, the significance of ecological warning is still very important, it can wake up the ecological consciousness of mankind, so that people continue to reflect on their own and restrain their behaviour.

In 80s of last century, the ecological literature to reflect the conflict between man and nature as the theme has made important achievements. Xu Gang's ecological literatures grasp the realistic problem of the ecological crisis, showing a strong sense of morality and sense of mission. *Woodcutter, wake up!* seize the reality of forest reduced, it reported the phenomenon of deforestation, and revealed the causes of ecological crisis. Although there

is a man, Chen Jianlin (陈建霖) who uses his life to guard Wuyishan, but he fights a lone battle. He is unable to defeat the earning-quick-buck mentality, and the people who sold their conscience to money. Despite from these, he also cannot resist the axe that cut down trees and the bureaucracy. The writer, Xu Gang had exposed the report from scenic spot of Wuyishan has always focus on the result; some of the cadre was not obey to the law or led others to do some illegal actions. People immersed in the vanity of wealth, but Xu Gang painfully remind us of the future:

The numbers of difficulties faced by human is exactly same as the forest bore with. The forest guards for human, but still often has to endure with the difficulties which imposed by human. Even so, the secret of natural is that: as time goes by, human will find that the punishments are just belong to human only (Xu, 1997, p. 37).

Nowadays, China faces more crisis than ever before. In Xu Gang's other works "Zhongguo: Lingyizhong weiji" (中国: 另一种危机 China: Another Crisis, 1995) reminds us of the increase of serious environmental crisis, the various abnormal weather that cause the cut down of water and power will lead people to have serious panic. In fact, the various environmental crises we are facing today are caused by human activities without restriction. In his *Shouwang Jiayuan* (守望家园 Watching Homeland, 1997) it has been mentioned that the changing of soil structure is due to the excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, by using water to irrigation is one of the culprits. After the water evaporation, the residual salt in soil resulted in the large area of land salinization. In "Chenlun de guotu" (沉沦的国土 Sink Land, 1989), Xu Gang pay attention on the sandstorm in Beijing. Scientists test the sand sample from the rostrum of Tiananmen, the result proves that these sands are come from dam of Hebei Zhangjiakou (河北张家口). From the mountains to rivers, from the pasture to desert, Xu Gang's ecological literatures have carried with endless cries and worries of writers.

### (3) Creative and Unique Aesthetic Value

There is rich aesthetic value in Xu Gang's ecological reportage works. He has done various explorations in reportage style, creatively used various strokes of poetry, prose and exposition in writing reportage. He cares about the refinement of language level, so that the text permeated with rich poetic, which formed a very unique in his narrative style, with deep and broad thinking capacity and high artistic value.

His ecological literature has distinctive characteristics both structurally and linguistically. As a poet, Xu Gang insists on using poetic language in the narration, to depict the beauty of the natural ecology, and create a picture of natural ecology with poetic feeling.

"On the grassland adjacent to the forest, the gazelle leaps recklessly, the dove flower, the broken-hearted grass, the magpie flower, corn poppy, these beautiful floret and the tall larch, the Scotch pine, the spruce, the Met sequoia lives together, enjoys the sunlight and the air, as well as from the Luanhe River (滦河)

source outflow's gurgling water”(FMXL p.69).

The aesthetic features of the author's ecological literature mainly show the real beauty of the subjective participation, the poetic expression of the unique narrative style and the reflection of the rational and humanistic spirit.

In structure, Xu Gang uses creative and unique structure frame, tone with the moderate historical description and historical allusions, to increase the readability of the works. When he describes the ancient Yellow River (黄河), according to the historical records of the “Prosperity of Han Dynasty” as an example:

“The reclamation of West Han is 8 million, the Eastern Han is 7 million, so far, all the forest at Yellow River valley being cut down, all the grass lay in ashes, all the land of Yellow River valley is reclaimed” (FMXL p. 34).

In language, he used a large number of scientific language, either accurate data or authoritative concept explanation has increased the credibility of the work, supplemented with prose-style lyric language, which brought aesthetic feeling to the boring ecological literature.

Xu Gang in the description of the Yellow river soil erosion, provided the following data: “You, the Yellow River yourself, cannot explain clearly, you cannot be cleaned thoroughly, you have become yellow in such a way, you are the world's most sediment-containing river, as high as 50%, during flooding, a yellow River is like a pot of mud. If the Yellow River declines 1.6 billion tons of silt annually, the silt can be used to build a one-metre long dike, in height and width respectively, equals to circle the Earth 32 laps. The nitrogen, phosphorus, potash that the Yellow River takes away is 40 million tons, equivalent to the 50 kg of fertilizer being washed away in every acre in the farmland of country” (FMXL p.35).

Besides the usage of scientific language, Xu Gang also used personified style in the description of Yellow River, for rhetorical effect to make the article more vivid and interesting.

In his works, Xu Gang often conveys the voice from inner heart of all creatures with personification, and expresses the sufferings of the nature. Some popular sentences are: “Haiyang shenyin” (海洋呻吟The Sea Groans), “Renshi shude zhijie” (人是树的枝节The People are the Branches of the Tree), “Zhangjiang muqin, nishuo, nishuo...” (长江母亲，你说，你说... Changjiang mother, you said, you said ...), “Diqiu leile” (地球累了The Earth is Tired), “Zhangjiang yishiqu naixin” (长江已失去耐心The Yangtze River has lost patience) and so on.

In the narrative aspect, he uses the grand narration method. According to Allan Megill's (1947-) *Grand Narrative and the Discipline of History*, “the all-encompassing narration, has the theme, the goal, the coherence and the unification” (Megill, 1995, p. 165). In Xu Gang's text, he shows free and open narrative structure, global view, with deep ideological connotation and cross-style writing method, all these have formed the unique

style of Xu Gang in his works.

#### **(4) Advocate Harmonious and Ecological Ideology**

Man and nature are the eternal themes of ecological literature. Where does the human sense of superiority come from? Where is the spirit of anthropocentrism? The creation of human language is undoubtedly great; people think they are rational beings, more noble than all the other creatures. Hence, human has always destructed and wantonly demand from the so-called inferior nature world. We cannot stop the pace of human development, shopping malls, high-rise buildings, subway, overpass, which are built at the expense of land. Is the destruction of environment in the process of urbanization unavoidable? Or after weigh up the cost and benefit, maybe human think that the destruction of natural resources tends to be a minor effect, then decided to vote for the lesser of two evils? The game between industrial development and nature conservation has just begun.

We have experienced the taste revenge by the nature, it is painful. Due to the frequent outbreak of various natural disasters, is it possible not to let us wake up? Xu Gang in *Woodcutter's* preface expressed his rethink on the relationship between man and human: "man does not dominate the nature", "man should seize the opportunity extend ethics to all things to the natural earth" (FMXL Preface: 4 & 8). In Xu Gang's Ecological Reportage, it is not difficult to see the idea of equality between man and nature, which provides a way for rethink. He said, "People should not only deal with human relations, social relations, but also apply moral sense to treat with mountains, water, vegetation and all living things" (Li, 2004, p. 28).

As mentioned above, ecological literature has the function of criticism, reflection and warning, but its final destination is to reflect the relationship between man and nature, and advocate the sustainable development of human and nature. Li Bingyi pointed:

Ecological literature aims to use a literary and artistic way to express the relationship between man and nature. So, to present the harmony between man and nature, the good prospects of mutual development and the phenomenon of damaged after infringed each other are an important content (Li, 2003, p. 361).

Xu Gang expressed his rethink on the relationship between man and nature in his works. In Xu Gang's opinion, the moment when human and natural can live in peace together which depends on when do human realize that every flowers and grasses have their own spirit. This means if we well treat flowers and grasses, they will also return us with love. In *Woodcutter, wake up!*, shows that forest rangers from Tianmu Mountain bring along with forest workers continuously to plant trees for three years, while results in softer soils, barren hills become green again. In the unsophisticated folkway of Tianmu Mountain, no one will put the axe on trees. Also, the cadres of Tianmu Mountain are not guile; they would rather to have little income and to choose to shut down the guesthouse due to the hidden danger of fire. And now, precious trees from all around the world have grown at Tianmu Mountain, bring fresh air to people and habitat to animals.

However, the luckiness of Tianmu Mountain is not that common, the ecological destruction in some other places is still staggering. Despite of the money, Xu Gang pointed out that the dregs in traditional ideology and cultural cannot escape from condemned as it is one of the human evil action to cause the destruction of natural. In *Woodcutter, wake up!*, while rich Wenzhou people are busy for building grave on mountain, the land for planting grains and vegetables is increasingly reduced, that is incompatible with the contemporary civilization, as they say the progress of material civilization and spiritual civilization are out of synchronization (Xu, 1997, p. 28-29).

Xu Gang also mentioned the burning mountain at Hainan (海南), villagers used the slash-and-burn method to burn tree and grass every spring season. This method has been carried out for a thousand years by Li (黎族) and Miao (苗族). This seems to be confirmed in a statement that, the development of human civilization has always confined by the traditional culture and always come along with the price in backward or lose of something. If the progress of civilization has to exchange with the price in serious deteriorate of ecological environment, then the cost is too high (Xu, 1997, p. 48).

After these years of traveling, Xu Gang has received true perception about nature, thus, his ecological literature has transferred from the initial of critique, suffering and reflecting gradually to the thought of harmonious development of man and nature. This confers a deep connotation to ecological literature. When we examine the relationship between human and nature, we should forgo the old way of using development perspective to deal environmental problem. In Xu Gang's articles, he enthusiastic praises to nature guardians and bitterly denounces to nature destroyers. He repeatedly reminded us that if we are short-sighted that only concern of present development, regardless of future generations, we are actually plundering the homeland of our descendants, and overdraft their future wealth. Thus, common development between man and nature is important, it not only benefits for ourselves but also good for the next generation.

Lu Shuyuan (鲁枢元, 1946-) said: "Ecological writers have revealed such thought in their works: the intrinsic of ecological crisis is actually a human crisis. When we are at the foot of the mountains, we have to look up to the sky, use awe thoughts to ponder every glorious thing that brought to us by the nature; when we climb up the mountains, we have to look down at vast earth, use our remorse to look at the lands that have been wantonly destructed by us" (Lu, 2000, p. 36). This is our responsible to take good care of all species on earth, by doing so, we able to save ourselves from the crazy nature revenge in the future. Zhe Fu (哲夫, 1955-) said, "if humans are willing to do the transposition thinking with bear, camel, cow or butterfly, willing to do transposition thinking to river, forest or land, then man is truly blessed" (Zhe, 2006, p. 39).

Besides criticism and deep sense of misery consciousness, ecological literature also provides us with a healthy lifestyle to live with, a perfect ecological ideology. While we are in the pursuit of material, we should pursuit spiritual wealth as well, to establish a "spiritual channel" between nature and soul (Zeng, 2000, p. 321). Most of the ecological literatures express the ideal to pursuit harmony between human and nature.

History cannot be reversed. Instead of thinking the fresh air in the agricultural civilization, it is better to plan how to live harmoniously with nature in today's industrial civilization.

Xu Gang's ecological reportages adherence and pursuit of humanitarianism and harmonious, which in line with He Rui (何蕊) said: "The humanitarian spirit was not only highlighted during the period of war and it was also appeared in the reportage about war. In fact, in addition to history reportage, reportages that promoting ecological balance, concern about human living environmental issue and exhibiting contemporary ethics and moral, always carry the meaning of humanitarianism and ultimate concern" (He, 2003, p. 45).

Facing the vast world and tomorrow's uncertainties, man's strength is so small like a dust that cannot dissociate from the earth. Thus, we must conform to the laws of nature. In the past, people used to say that mountain evergreen, river ever flow, but if we violate the laws of nature and wantonly destructing the environment, the mountains and rivers will eventually disappear from our sight. After all, the need for environmental protection is for the overall interests of the ecosystem, and human long-term interests and fundamental interests are the same. Therefore, to improve the relationship with nature, equal and harmonious treatment of natural things, to stop the exploitation and devastation of nature, rebuild the harmonious coexistence of man and nature to become the main goal of ecological civilization.

##### **(5) Natural Landscape and Promote Good Governance**

Xu Gang's ecological reportage holds a specific social political role within the Chinese social imaginary. This type of reportage has not only become the pioneers in this field, but also exceeded the frame of mere literary production.

In *Woodcutter, wake up!*, Xu Gang specifically employs the natural landscape to amplify certain sociocultural connotations of Chinese ecological reportage that are heavily endowed with notions relating to good governance, such as remonstrance against corruption, and seclusion from political office within nature. In *Woodcutter*, Xu Gang accounts his conversation with a villager who just comes back from cutting trees:

Xu Gang: "Are there no forest rangers in your village?"

Villager: "Those are the first ones to cut trees! Whether it's the forest officers, or party cadres, they're all the cousin of some village head, or the nephew of some party secretary: They pocket 40 Yuan a month for 'forest protection', and continue logging as before. Why should we common folk not also cut some trees ourselves then?"

Xu Gang: "But what about the higher-ranking cadres?"

Villager: "Oh, they all do it. But for them, it doesn't matter, because they can have [the timber] delivered right to their doorstep, isn't that even better?" (Xu, 1997, p. 16)



In the context, Xu Gang inexorably discloses the corrupt and immoral behavior of the local cadres themselves whose duty would be to carry out the central government's orders:

“They [the villagers] only fear the cadres actually in charge on the village and on the county level; the real power is in the hands of these lower officers, who will always grant protection to the people of their own native villages. What good is a law in this situation?” (Xu, 1997, p. 8)

In Xu Gang's reportage, he has not only made up sharp criticisms on natural destruction caused by civilization, but also pointing out institutional failures between local and centre governments, he reminds his readers:

The Daxing'anling wildfire has been caused by a bunch of irresponsible and conniving people; the tinder that caused this fire blaze has been sown by these bureaucrats who were derelict of their duty. Amidst these green forest, where the sun shines bright and the air smells fresh, there are at least some black corners: The fire that devoured Mohe County (漠河县) did not devour the county secretary's villa; faced with raging flames that consumed the forests, the head of one fire department actually did not order the fire trucks to fight the blaze or rescue the civilians, but rather had his men save the county secretary's and his own villas, and to be more effective even bulldozed the surrounding houses of some ordinary people to create a fire barrier. It does not get more graphic than these examples! [Xu, 1997, p. 37].

In Xu Gang's writing, he always mercilessly tells us the truth about what he sees and what he thinks. In *Woodcutter, wake up!*, he heavy reveals that forests continually being destroyed; the cruel reality of water loss and soil erosion issue, thorough reflection and criticism on human without regard to satisfy the desire of greed toward environment. The author not only, from the ecological balance angle, put forward scientific basis for protecting natural resources, at the same time, he also makes reflection and criticism on the govern system and bureaucracy. He even proposes the authority to institutionally remove those who impeded ecological protection. Because of these, the Forest Minister at that time sincerely lamented: “We should be grateful to Xu Gang, he gave big slam to our back, made us awake from sleeping!” (Li, 2004, p. 38).

Right after Xu Gang wrote *Woodcutter, wake up!*, it immediately caused a sensation throughout the country. It is precisely because of this work, fundamentally changed people's understanding of forests and nature, and furthermore profoundly influenced decision-making of the authority. Since then, the forestry activity has through a difficult changed from logging orientated to ecological constructive forestry operation (Li, 2004, p. 38).

Even though social imaginary approach is commonly used in most of reportages, the difference is that Xu Gang inserts natural environment in his ecological reportages that functions as a crucial amplifier to the social imaginary that he wants to convey. Thorough

reflection and criticism on human endless desired and greed toward environment (Liehr, 2013, p. 86).

#### 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, Xu Gang's ecological reportage does not simply record and highlight the conflict between man and nature, but rather questions this life-threatening situation and strives for the truth. Xu is a writer with green thinking and his creation transcends an era, a thing and a nation. Standing on the world, all human's height level, he use philosopher's sober wisdom to think about the future of mankind, calling for the consciousness of the whole group of mankind, calling for the restoration of harmony between man and nature.

Almost all of Xu Gang's works revolve around a theme for the beauty and vastly life. His works show the unity of perceptual and rational, objective and subjective. It contains rich pool of natural aesthetics, which permeate author's evaluation and critique on human behavior while symbolizing author's ecological ideology and moral appeal. This is a powerful role of ecological literature, it lets us come closer to recognizing the roots of ecological crisis, and more effectively correct the path of human existence, optimize the model of economic development and build a harmonious community with an idyllic living environment.

In *Woodcutter, wake up!*, the author draws his inspiration primarily from traditional Chinese ideas and values of human nature. This creation also holds a specific social political role of "awakening". The evolution of environmentalist thought in the late 70s can be captured in two moments of "awakening". In the 1980s, one of contributor to the earlier moment was creative writer Xu Gang's 1987 reportage *Woodcutter, wake up!*. Despite the rise of environmental awareness among many intellectuals and sporadic action at the local level, there was little concerted effort on the national level to combat the environmental threat.

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