Article Complex and its Ecology: Reconstructing Writers’ Identity in Consumer Age

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Article Complex, though as a term it is somehow collocated together in English this way, has long been rooted in both Chinese literati and Western metaphysics since Plato and in the practice of many writers. In general, it refers to the writers’ self-position and evaluation towards their articles and the ensuing belonging and cherishing mentality. As the title suggests, how can the seeming traditional and old-fashioned Article Complex with its nostalgia apply to the age of McDonalds and Supergirls? To answer this, the paper tries to offer an alternative frame of reference—the ecology of literature, rather than the consumers—in the consumer age of the literary world; through the sustainable ecology of literature, the brave new world may open again before us.

A. What Makes Article Complex Possible in the Consumer Age: The Inner Nature of Article Complex

Article complex is rather a mental consciousness, guidance and orientation of writers in, before and after their composition of any articles. Through the long time
advocacy and practice, it involves generally three layers, i.e. the writers' cognitive, metacognitive or axiology and the metaphysical sense of fatherland.

In the writers' cognitive level, Article Complex expands the writers' consciousness of composition. In China, Laozi first mentions that human beings learn from the earth, while the heaven is the mother of the earth; the heaven emulates from Dao, the way, and nature guides them all (with its Chinese equivalence “人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然” from Chapter 25, *The Book of the Way*) (Cheng Fuwang 369); in the structure of human-nature relations, human beings should lift themselves to the nature, while article is just the bridge and best connection between the literati and nature. The ancient people elaborated this point in various verses and words and through the pre-Qin to the Qing dynasty distinctively, even to the May Fourth period; during the whole time, though there were historical, cultural differences, the universal subject of writers is established and confirmed. In the Western world, though the emphasis was slightly different, the writers’ subject was set in the whole philosophical construction through the efforts of Plato, Aristotle, etc. until the Romantic period. Under this guidance, the writers purposely pursue the Big I they can identify with nature from the mere ego. On one hand, the life experience of writers are instilled into the article; on the other hand, they realize that merely individual experience is not enough, or, with the subject of local and personal, they will connect it with the greater and broader space, so that their article can appeal to the invisible yet definitely existing judges, themselves, their peers and readers.

Secondly, on the writers’ metacognitive or axiological level, with the promise of article’s eternal value, the writers put their aspiration and trust into their articles more than anything else. Though Stephen Owen argues that in the later dynasty of China, the value of books or articles is put even higher than one’s family, nation even one’s own life, which is definitely a destructive and distorting value since it upsets the order of value (Owen 112), as a counter-evidence, it proves that articles break through the mere self indulgence and expression, and have their own value and ecological frame of reference to judgment. Therefore, it will influence at least two coordinates in writers’ attitudes of composition. Primarily, the writers’ composition is future-oriented in terms of time. Every writer is not only a writer of simple words but the originator and creator of ideas and even the intangible divine existence. Therefore, the simple and thin article can have the full possibility to become canon, yet the canon will not be locked in the dark room but enjoyed by the
One question put forward is whether readers ever exist in the Article Complex age. The paper argues that the readers, till then not being contaminated by the consumer age, can be rather categorized as the arts’ audience in Western sense or literary works’ appreciators in Chinese sense. The article-to-canon process, on one hand, guarantees the possibility that everyone, only if possessing the right talents and insights, can become the writer of great canon even if it is not in one’s living time. In this sense, writing is not towards the individual death, but towards all’s eternity. This may be the alternative American dream of “everyone can be president”. On the other hand, the audience and appreciators, though they are different in the refined or entertaining taste, are educated in the gradually standardized judging process; in this sense, Article Complex is a double growth model, the mutual trust and optimism between the writers and their receivers are interacted.

Furthermore, in the coordinate of space, the Article Complex not only breaks the traditional geographical demarcation of one writer from another, of the national, of the sexual, but also aims at the destination towards the fatherland, the utopia where all beings’ harmony coexist.

B. What Makes the Article Complex Necessary in the Consumer Age: The General Picture of Writers in Consumer Age

In the consumer age, the core issue is the loss of the traditional universal writers’ identity depending on the relation with nature, and the ensuing proliferated, individualized and visualized chaos of all writers.

By borrowing the effective analysis frame by M. H. Abram—the work, the universe, the artist and the audience, we can see in Article Complex age, the frame with the four element is an organic ecology, where the work acts not only as a bridge between the universe, the poet, the audience, and be tint of this, the work has its own eternal value. Thus the poet or the writer’s position can be established firmly and constantly. In the consumer age, from the challenge of all the four elements, the writers’ identity in universe are reducing to nil, atom even sub-atom.

First, on the metaphysics level, the long history of challenging the existence and function of God is consistent. In the literary field, nature, gods or God, deities and divinity often co-exist, and each time literature can find its way to save itself. In the consumer age, the core problem is no longer whether gods or God are existing beyond or in the world, but that people turn their eyes to the secular world more and
more; in other words, the world is secularized to nausea that people can sense the poetic homeland no more.

Second, in the writers’ relation with the fatherland, the main challenge comes from Jean-François Lyotard. In his famous *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), he holds that the intellectuals, by using the metanarrative, thus legitimize their own identity and subject in their narrative; in the postmodern world, with the suspicion of the metanarrative (that is the authoritative and accepted narratives as in literature, politics and culture), the writers’ identity as the legal representative of human culture, history, etc. becomes dubious, which directly threatens the core position of writers.

Third, on the level of work, in the consumer age, work is regarded as the goods with the ability of copy and proliferation. Though Michel Foucault emphasizes the independence of writing, for him, writing is just a game, where there is no meaning but it just refers to itself. When writing, the writer becomes absent and acts as the dead in this game, thus writing is the end of writer and the beginning of reader’s reading (Wang Yuechuan 32). It is more an appealing and a right conferred to the reader than the emphasis on the writer or the work.

Facing the challenge and the threat of breaking all chains between the writer, the work, the audience and the universe, the first problem is: do readers in consumer age function as a good frame of reference?

C. The Unscalable Principle: the Weather Cock, the Dormant Reader or the Readers?

In the consumer age, facing the loss of the universality of writers’ identity, the readers’ orientation accelerates the direction towards mercerization, yet just as whether readers really exist in the Article Complex age, do readers function as a good frame of reference in consumer age? Though we are told through the market research and questionnaires that the readers are categorized and subcategorized, the paradox still exists, that is, how can we scale the taste and amount when the subject in writing has lost? Right, the readers can guide themselves, yet just as Cheng Fuwang says about our attitude towards Chinese traditional culture, if even we as Chinese do not know what it is, how can we compare it with others? We can put the same question here, when the writers do not know what they are, how can they know what others are? Maybe one sentence can reveal the secret: “Items are produced not because they are intended to meet a particular need, but because they
can generate a particular profit" (Hsu). The readers in consumer age have become the consumers, and facing the false others, the writers do not concern too much about the poetic salvation, but turn to the personal shows and all acrobatics.

In America, since the literature turns to realism with the combination of secular life full of people’s desire and erotic, the consumer age is beginning to invade the literary field. When the direct appealing loses its charm, the writers pretend to be mystic in order to remain their prestige and publicity. In Consuming Silences: How We Read Authors Who Don’t Publish, Myles Weber studies the connection between authorship as profession and literature as a market and marketable commodity through the case study such as J. D. Salinger, Henry Roth, Ralph Ellison, etc (5). This situation is rampant and even becomes the common acknowledgement bearing in the hearts of the authors. For example, in China, the post 1980s Star Making Plan produces the modern and fashionable writers one troop after another. In order to meet the market demand and cover more sale proportion, the writers have to give up their original intention. They either borrow the oversea techniques of narrative or make full use of the cyber and image resources. At the same time, they enjoy the misreading from the readers, simply from the reason that the more the readers misread you, the more chance you can catch the public attention and gain more eyeball rates (Peking Chinese Forum).

With writing becoming a routine and loses its divine tint, writers’ identity is described by Frederic Jameson as the subject of schizophrenia, for the schizoid can not sense the personal identity which depends on the continuity of time, and the schizoid is in the state of time disorder. In the aesthetic model of schizophrenia, it first embodies in the work. The work becomes merely textuality and writability, the subsystem and subtext of total differences (Wu Qiong 232). However, in this system of text, it is a “spiritual pollution and contamination” (Gao Xingjian), containing the copy of the rough translation style of the modern Western works, the improper mimicry of language not belonging to this age and circumstance, which, though industrious and huge in amount, naturally contains little literary value (Zhou Bingxin 91). Secondly, the subject is in the state of extreme ecstasy, yet it is the state of dystopia without ideals, realized when nature recedes (Wu Qiong 232). Furthermore, by borrowing the space concept from architecture and other philosophers such as Henry Lefebvre, Frederic Jameson views that in the cognitive level, due to the unrealism of the real world, the subject is unable to posit oneself in the world. He then puts up the cognitive mapping in which the subject’s
consciousness of position is enhanced by the way of totality. That is to say, the subject can evaluate the economical, political and cultural world in a right way and regain the power of action (244).

Frederic Jameson's suggestion is insightful, yet the paradox also lies in that first we should have a sense of totality, then this feeling of totality can become a map to guide us in action. So in this recycling, the problem returns to the origin: facing the death of author, the death of God, the death of literary work and the flood of texts, the unscalability of reader, facing the ever urging pressure of Publish or Perish, can the writers really re-posit their identity from Article Complex and regain the power of action?

D. La Vie en Rose, Instilling Life in Writer, Reader, Work and Universe

From the analysis before, the core problem we find in consumer age with the writer is life, and vitality of writer, of the reader, of the universe and of the work. The slogan may not be Publish or Perish, but rather before the writer writes, one has already dead, or the moment the writer is writing, the moment one dies, for how can one write a work with eternity when there is no heaven on earth, no divinity in heart, and no reader likes it after merely one glance. Many literary lovers and writers, with their practical experience, advocate this point in various forms and voices. Yan Chunjun says that at least a writer should not only write a work in the sole role of a writer, but read their work as a reader at the same time, so that a real work can be created (Yan Chunjun 12). In the classical world, no matter out of what kind of reason or motivation, we can hardly imagine writers do not like even cherishing their own work, yet with the changing of time, in the consumer age, this natural and innate feeling becomes a poor petition. Just as the Nobel Prize Peace winner nun Teresa claims, it is not how many things you do that matters, but how many love you put in these things that matters, which is definitely applicable to the writers in the consumer age who are lack of spiritual concerns.

On the philosophical and aesthetic level, Heidegger gives the recipe of ecological aesthetics and ethics. Through the expansion of "we" as the moral subjects to the outside objects and world, we can instill into the objects which are the moral neutral ones with morality, thus the outside objects and world are connected with human beings. Yet he argues that this principle will not work when the individual body dies. The Japanese scholar Watsujitetsurou [和辻哲郎] gives a different answer—though the individual even the collective death of human beings exist, this principle is not towards death, but towards life, for human beings is constituted by the double
threads, the line of individual and that of society (Bei’erke 43). Just from life as an ultimate concern and goal, the Article Complex, with not only its promise but facts of the eternity of the writer, the universe, the reader and the work’s life, can rekindle the writer’s consciousness in self position in, before and after writing, broaden the orientation of readers, combine the human’s soul and the nature’s soul, and make works stand the test of time and retain its vitality. More information on the case study of China or America’s ecological literature or the works and writers with Article Complex will leave to later research.

Notes:
[1] In the Ming and Qing dynasty, even the emergence of the new genre novel, most notably the literary novel is dabbed with the intention to live for the later generations; the writers hold that the composition of literary works are both the expression of personal intent and that of the heaven, or in Chinese, 太上立德，其次立功，其次立言，斯三者，皆亘古而不朽也，即立德立功，非藉言以传之，后人亦曷从而知之耶？See from Study on Literati’s Novels in Eighteenth Century’s China [中国十八世纪文人小说研究], by Li Mingjun [李明军]. Kunlun Press, 2002: 73-75.

[2] According to Li Yang’s [李杨] study, in China’s May Forth period, the dominant metanarrative is enlightenment, though it borrows the Western name, its aim is to establish the utopia on earth, or in other words, connecting the spiritual and the secular. See from “Resistance from Subjugation Overwhelms Enlightenment”?: The Deconstructive Analysis of One Historic Meta-Narrative in 1980s” [“救亡压倒启蒙”?: 对八十年代一种元叙事的解构分析], Book house [书屋], 2002, (5):4-15.

[3] The examples can be seen from the doctrine of Transcendentalism in America, the origin of the novel Moby Dick composed by Herman Melville the Romanist, the “Art for Art’s Sake” School or the Aesthetic School leading by Oscar Wilde in England, and the various literary theory in Chinese classic, together with the ancient writers self introduction for their writing from the epigraph or preface. For the save of space, these examples are omitted here.

[4] Also in the Ming and Qing Dynasties of China, the writers and critics hold that though the fabrications in novel and romance is not believable, yet the articles or the literary works are composed to be eternal. See from Study on Literati’s Novels in Eighteenth Century’s China [中国十八世纪文人小说研究], by Li Mingjun [李明军]. Kunlun Press, 2002: 73-75.

[5] For the sake of space, this point will not be elaborated; examples can be seen from the Book of Songs in The Bible till later generation such as the Southern American writer William Faulkner, etc.

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