Interpretation of Possible Worlds of *The Buddha of Suburb* and Its Multi-themes*

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Abstract—The article attempts to use cognitive poetics' possible worlds theory to explore how the novel The Buddha of Suburbia narrates stories with its unique skills and how readers participate in the reading process and form possible worlds about the novel so as to understand such multiple themes as identity, racial discrimination and features of the times in it.

Index Terms—cognitive poetics, possible worlds theory, The Buddha of Suburbia, multi-themes

I. INTRODUCTION

Possible worlds theory is a very important category in cognitive poetics, this theory in literary works, the internal structure, character, plot and theme has certain advantages, this article will attempt to use possible worlds theory to analyze the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*'s unique narrative techniques, discusses how the readers participate in text reading and form the possible worlds, and then analyze how multiple themes like identity, racial discrimination and features are reflected in the novel.

II. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA

The Buddha of Suburbia is written by Pakistani immigrant descendant Hanif Kureishi who was born in 1954 in Kent county, the UK, and he majored in philosophy at university, he was usher in the royal theatre, later he became the theatre's resident writer, to a certain extent, he is one of great Asian writers having a significant achievement effect on the literary in the world after Salman Rushdie. In 1990, *The Buddha of Suburbia* won Whitebread prize for literature. The novel tells the story of leading character Karim in the form of a semi-autobiographical way. Karim was born in London, but his father was migrated from Pakistani descent, is not the same as her mother, she is from England. The writer Hanif Kureishi focuses on the growth of description of the leading characters Karim and his father Haroon in the novel to reflect their unique identity, at the same time, the work also depicts the growth of the protagonist, father's lover Eva's influence on the process of Karim's pursuing and achieving his plans and dreams, Eva's son Charlie, and important director like Parker and other important characters, and it also describes Karim's relationship with father, uncle and aunt, the close relatives who are immigrants and their descendants are also from Pakistan, but now they are living in London, the UK facing survival, life experience and the opportunity, which reflects the identity crisis that has happened to them in the post-colonial Era in the UK, racial discrimination, class inequality and experience of change the Era.

III. THE POSSIBLE WORLDS THEORY OF COGNITIVE POETICS

A. An Overview of Cognitive Poetics

The earlier famous research about cognitive poetics is from Reuven Tsur at Tel Aviv University. In 1992, he published theoretical works on Cognitive Poetics -- T*oward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics* (the first edition). After 2002, Stockwell Peter published another book, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction.* In 2008, Tsur Reuven also published his book *Toward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics* the second edition of the cognitive poetics theory. In recent years, the domestic scholars have gradually introduced and studied the cognitive poetics, and analyzed the literary works by some methods of cognitive poetics. Stockwell Peter (2009) believes that Tsur Reuven is the "inventor" of cognitive poetics which is regarded as a scientific research method by Tsur. In Reuven Tsur's the second edition of the book T*oward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics*, he pointed out: "cognitive poetics is an interdisciplinary analysis method and cognitive science is believed to provide the basic theoretical research, the aim is to explore the understanding and information processing is how to limit and influence of poetry language and form, or the critic reviews." That is to say, the cognitive theory provided by cognitive poetics is about how to systematically explain the relationship between the structure of literary text and its effect. Stockwell Peter (2002) argues that cognitive poetics is a fundamental way of thinking about literature. In addition, and Gavins Steen (2003) clearly states that cognitive poetics is not only a branch of cognitive

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science, but also a new poetic form. Reuven Tsur attaches great importance to the cognitive poetics which is used in analyzing or interpreting of poetry. But Peter Stockwell attachs more importance to poetics concept of modernity, the composition of the system theory. But no matter it is Reuven or Tsur Peter Stockwel who focuses on the effect analysis of the cognitive poetics and regards it as a method of literary analysis of the effect. However, Peter Stockwell values it more. In his 2002 book *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, Peter Stockwell thinks that cognitive poetics is not only influenced by cognitive science but also by some of the concepts and methods which are used to analyze literary text, a special chapter in his book discusses some basic problems of literature, such as literary nature, literary function, character types and number of literature basic category such as mimesis imitation, texture, discourse, ideology, emotion, imagination and so on. (Semino,1997) Application of cognitive poetics is not only a concept from the cognitive linguistics. It uses the cognitive psychology, stylistics, literary narration, the traditional literary criticism and other disciplines method. For example, in Steen and Gavins' (2003) published book *Cognitive Poetics in Practice* which is treated as the companion book of *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, they discussed the script, mode, fable, world theory, thought, emotion and imagination. These concepts or propositions do not belong to the category of cognitive linguistics, but they are beyond cognitive linguistics research. At present, domestic scholars are inclined to agree with Peter Stockwell that cognitive poetics is a kind of new literature theory and is not only a kind of analysis method, but it is indeed the methodology innovation foundation based on the "cognitive" analysis of features of literature criticism theory – is not a sort of literary theory but criticism theory. (Semino, 1997)

B.   The Theory of Possible World

Possible world concept is firstly put forward by the German famous logician Leibniz (1646-1716), he defined "possible world" as that there is no possibility of contradictory propositions, that is to say, the logical consistency. If the combination of state or thing is illogical, then the combination of state or this thing is possible, this may be the combination of the "possible world". Steen and Gavins think that possible worlds theory was originally developed by philosophers and logicians in order to deal with logical problems, such as the truth values of propositions and the ontological status of non-actual entities. The possible worlds of logic are abstract, complete and consistent sets of states of affairs conceived for the purpose of logical operations. In contrast, the possible worlds of fiction are 'furnished', incomplete, and potentially inconsistent constructs conceived by interpreters in their dynamic interactions with texts (Stockwell 2002a, for example, adopts the term 'discourse worlds' when applying the notion of possible worlds to text analysis) (see also Eco 1989; Semino 1997). In fact, narrative scientists who are devoted to the possible worlds theory may mention the role of background knowledge of readers in reading the novel in the process of mental modification of the fictional world. And, in some cases, they try to solve the problems of the construction of the fictional world from the text level. However, in general, the novel analytical approaches of a possible world of the novel focus on what we can call "products" which is regarded as our understanding of the novel, namely, after a series of complex process of understanding, the readers gain and characteristics and structure of fictional world. The advantage of this method in the cognitive poetics is that it attaches great importance to big problems in novels, such as the definition, the fictional world of the internal structure, differences of various types, the development of the plot and the plot of the aesthetic potential, etc.

Later scholars gradually analyze and explain this theory in literary works. As an important theory in Cognitive Poetics: a study of "possible world" in Stockwell Peter's book *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* has been discussed in the seventh chapter. In this book, the author classified the "possible worlds theory" into a concept or proposition of cognitive poetics. "A possible world (even the actual possible world) is not the same as the rich everyday world we experience around us. A possible world is a philosophical notion, constituted by a set of propositions that describe the state of affairs in which a sentence can exist. It is a formal logical set, not a cognitive array of knowledge. This means that possible worlds theory has little to say about the worlds of literary reading. However, the approach can be adapted so that we can speak of discourse worlds that can be understood as dynamic readerly interactions with possible worlds: possible worlds with a narratological and cognitive dimension." In accordance with the theory of possible world, "each might be and each might have been is a possible world, because they have some kind of internal consistency and logic." (Girle, 2003) According to the "possible worlds theory" Elena Semino proposes three levels, the readers in the process of understanding discourse will form mental representation in their brains about the discourse no matter whether the discourse is fictional or real. This kind of mental representation is called "text worlds" in cognitive poetics. Usually, analysis of understanding of the text world begins with dividing the discourse into three aspects. The first one is discourse world which contains two or more participants are involved in a language event. The participants in this event may involve either face-to-face or long-distance conversation, or written communication of any type. With the development of the discourse world, each participant constructs a mental representation, or text world, by which they are able to process and understand the discourse at hand. This world forms the next level of a Text World Theory analysis. Once the text world is constructed and developing, countless other worlds which depart from the parameters of the initial text world may also be created. These departures form the final layer of Text World Theory and are called 'sub-worlds' or 'possible worlds'".

Based on Elena semino's views, Xiong MuQing (2011b) enriched and developed the main roles of the possible worlds theory in cognitive poetics to seven aspects: In particular, possible worlds theory provides a useful framework for the definition of fiction, the description of the internal structure of fictional worlds, and the differentiation between

different genres; is also useful in describing the internal structure of the textual universe, and in accounting for the development of the plot, text analysis of the multiple narrative layer and narrative point of view; text analysis of the multiple themes and meaning, excavating aesthetic potential in text. The theory of possible world does not bring us a ready-made model of text analysis, it inspires us to examine more things in works. Because of this, we take *the Buddha of Suburbia* as the object of study to find out not only description of the "identity theme" of the novel, but by reading the novel, the readers can have their thinking and understanding of the novel text world, then analyze and create more possible worlds so as to focus on the novel's multiple themes including character identity, race discrimination and the era's characteristics.

IV.   MULTIPLE THEMES IN THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA

A.   *Hybrid Identity*

The Buddha of Suburbia tells the story of the leading character Karim by using the method of semi-autobiographical type, Karim, the Pakistani immigrant descent born in the UK, "His experience, to some extent, is the metaphor of racial discrimination and identity confusion of the second generation Asian group in the UK, but Karim's identity crisis was resolved through performing effectively on the stage, he came from the edge of society to the mainstream of it." Stuart Hall (2000) pointed out, "Cultural identities has its source and history. Just like everything has a history, they experienced a constant change. They will never be perpetually fixed in a past history but to succumb to the nature of change." At the beginning of the story, the protagonist Karim introduces himself as follows:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care—Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. (Hanif Kureishi, 2007)

When the readers read such a self-introduction about the protagonist Karim, they will construct "text world" in their brain, imagining what the UK is like, where the protagonist Karim was locally born and bred in order to recreate the scene in their brain, in addition to looking for clues from reading and understanding the text, the reader need to know and be familiar with all kinds of background knowledge of British social life at that time. And along with the readers' reading, development of the plot, further understanding of the text, if the protagonist Karim's description of his identity makes us believe that they are possible, then one possible world will be set up in the reader's mind, that is the protagonist Karim's own identity blur and confusion: such as introduction of "almost I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman" shows that Karim is not certain about his identity, and also highlights Karim's ambivalence about his own identity. And then the Karim says, "I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories", "But I don't care—Englishman I am (though not proud of it)". What can be inferred from this is that Karim wants to show such a fact that "I'm British", and thus we could believe that the possible world of the description about Karim does exist by combining narration about his father and mother, background knowledge, life experience and the author's background in the following parts of the novel. Then the readers will form the possible worlds about Karim's parents' identity, Karim's parents' identity and Karim's relatives' identity. Karim's father is an Indian man who was expected to study in UK in the 1950s, Karim's mother is white British. Based on the "reality" of the novel text, since that day when Karim was born (although he was born and bred), he was destined to dual mixed identities, namely, Pakistani British. When reading the novel, the readers find that Karim could realize the fact that his own identity is full of particularity, uncertainty and absence, so he loves white British Charlie—Eva's son, and tried to be close to him, and to imitate him, hope to be able to become him, to change his identity of uncertainty. Karim says, "Because I love him more than myself, I'd like to change into him, I have a longstanding obsession with his intellect, appearance and demeanor, I want all things that belong to Charlie transferred to me." (Hanif Kureishi, 2007) In the later narration of the story, Karim does not give up his pursuit of determining his own identity, he contacts some directors, and performs identity in the directors' plays. The author of this novel build "real text world" for the protagonist Karim who is eager to get self-identity, namely Karim has confusion about his identity in the novel, and he attempts to change his identity of combination and uncertainty in a number of ways with great efforts and struggle, Logically it is not untrue, which accords with people's cognitive characteristics, the readers believe that in Karim's efforts and struggle are real. And Karim is trying to solve his identity crisis, to get rid of the uncertainty of identity, such as imitating Charlie, performing theatrical multiple roles in the director's plays, want to be white person or a person who has a determined identity, which belongs to Karim's wish worlds (wish worlds, mainly refers to the ideal, hope, desire) . Karim dreams of waking up to become white person like Charlie, this is obviously Karim's fantasy universes (fantasy universes, mainly refers to the dream and illusion, etc.) Gavins Steen (2003). Finally, with his own excellent performance moving forward step by step, it helps him to eliminate his identity crisis, and to achieve his wish world, namely, the possible world.

In fact, it is not only the protagonist Karim who has such uncertain identity problems in this novel, Jamila, daughter of his uncle Mr Anwar, also has the same as problems. Karim is obsessed with his awkward fuzzy hybrid identity, which also draw the outline of the possible world about Jamila for the readers:

Yes, sometimes Jami (Jamila's nickname) and I were French, sometimes African Americans, but the reality is that we should be English, but for the British people, we have been the only persons in the Middle East, Africa, or Pakistan and

other similar fellows. (Hanif Kureishi, 2007)

Thus it can be seen that the writer of *The Buddha of Suburb* narrates the story mostly by using "I"—the protagonist Karim, the readers are presented with possible worlds of Kerim who is on behalf of the descendants of immigrants of India and Pakistan to tell us confusion about their mixed identity.

B.   Racial Discrimination

Before or during the process of reading the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the readers will find out personal information about the novelist Hanif Kureishi, but also concern about the creative background of the novel. The readers will find in conjunction with their knowledge and experience that the author Hanif Kureishi of *The Buddha of Suburbia* reflects his own personal growing experiences by the protagonist Karim, then the protagonist Karim of the novel is, to some extent, the author Hanif Kureishi's portrayal. The protagonist Karim's father is a Pakistani, his mother is English, so is the author Hanif Kureishi. Therefore, Hanif Kureishi is more concerned about survival and living conditions of immigrants of India and Pakistan, so there is no exception in his novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. "*The Buddha of Suburbia* is such a piece of work; it is descriptions of race, class, sex, identity, pop culture, fashion, drugs and sex under the multicultural conflicts and the prospect of integration." (Hanif Kureishi, 2002) The creative background of the novel is the British society of 1960s and 1970s when the racial problem was very serious. In fact, the readers can have better understanding of the novel through background knowledge, not difficult to find that the author Hanif Kureishi also has similar experiences of racial inequalities as the main character Karim, and continue to construct the possible worlds about the main character and the author Hanif Kureishi, that is, whether they are in real life or in the possible world, they may belong to ethnic populations, India and Pakistan, who have experienced unfair racial discrimination. Hanif Kureishi admitted, "From the very beginning, I tried to deny my identity in Pakistan, I would like to get rid of a curse like it, I would just like to everyone else." (Hanif Kureishi, 2002) The protagonist Karim also has a similar idea and desire that he wants to change the situation in which he is regarded as part of the India-Pakistan who suffered racial discrimination in the UK. He introduced himself at the beginning of the novel, "I am an Englishman born and bred, almost." But "I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman", after reading these sentences the readers can not help asking a question, what kind of people the protagonist Karim belong to? And in the readers' mind, Karim's image and his possible worlds will be outlined: black skin, but not too dark, a descendant of India and Pakistan. In his life experience in the outskirts of London, Karim often feels racial discrimination. Local white British superiority is extremely obvious, especially discrimination against blacks, they do not want to contact with the group of descendants of immigrants from India and Pakistan, just as the white girl Helen's father put, "No matter what negroes do, we do not like. We keep in touch with whites only." In school, Karim was also subject to racial discrimination, and therefore he wanted to leave the suburbs where he has been living for a long time to the city center. Later Karim came to London urban to develop in entertainment business, either the director Chadeville or the director Parker felt that Karim was particularly suited to play the role of blacks, so Karim could not escape the fate of being discriminated by whites at that time. "In fact, in the eyes of the white people, as long as you are not white, you are black." (YinXiaoxia, 2014)

Karim's father Haroon, as one of the first-generation immigrant representatives of India and Pakistan in the novel, he was often subject to British whites' discrimination because of his long-term in the post-colonial area where white people have "British Empire Pride", "white superiority" of mainstream society. So he began to confine himself in a small circle of life, but he also got lost when he goes out. "Dad came to Britain in 1950, it has been more than 20 years. In recent fifteen years he lived in South London, but he will go the wrong way, just like disembarked Indians who newly settled in the United Kingdom…" (Hanif Kureishi, 2007) Later, Haroon was strongly trying to get rid of the shadow of racial discrimination, studying eastern philosophy and Buddhism thoughts in order to meet British curiosity and desire about oriental wisdom and to help the British white people solve spiritual problems, and thus Haroon got so-called "suburb Buddha" for himself who then found "recipe" to get rid of the shadow of racial discrimination.

Therefore, when the readers read this part of the novel, they will combine the natural background and fiction novels describing the descendants of immigrants from India and Pakistan with "real experience", and in their brain form scenes of being discriminated about ethnic minorities and Karim's father Haroon and other groups in London, the readers will think descriptions of descendants of immigrants Pakistan suffering racial discrimination in the text is real and credible, and then build the possible world about racial discrimination. In this possible world, Karim and his father Haroon made great efforts in order to achieve the ideal world of the mind (wish world)—keeping away from the racial discrimination suffered by themselves, which also further promote the development of the novel plot.

C.   The Characteristics of That Era

The novel describes the situation of social life in London in 1960s and 1970s when is the period of the rapid development of punk culture, the novel is full of music, sex, drugs and other characteristics of the times elements. The readers will continue to be exposed to this kind of time in the process of reading and interpreting the novel to feel characteristic elements of changing times, the article will take one of the most representative contemporary features of the novel— pop music for example to illustrate the main characters in the possible worlds of the novel. Haroon's lover Eva was keen on music of The Rolling Stones and Third Ear Band, every time when Karim goes to Eva's home, she would ask him to choose and play some of her favorite pop music. Eva's son Charlie, a white man, is also Karim's good friend who is Karim's object of imitation. Charlie has affection for rock music more than anyone else. He secretly plays

rock music at school, "at home there are piles of records, and there is a photo of four members of the Beatles during Sergeant Pepper on the wall, they are like God" (Hanif Kureishi, 2007). Thus, Charlie "tried to imitate the new trend to get rid of the features of suburbs to transform himself into a punk hero when he first arrived in central London; after arriving in the United States, he became the rock star by relying on 'Englishness' and the trafficking of British fashion." (YinXiaoxia, 2014) Charlie's career flourished in this process because he has a special idea for his future, and later he matured and planed his future, the process presents the readers Charlie's hope, that is called wish world in which he wish he was about to glory, to be successful and to become a pop star. Finally one day, Charlie made realization of these aspirations: "Charlie naturally appears on television and in newspapers all of a sudden, you would not be able to escape him and his flourishing career, and he succeeded..." (Hanif Kureishi, 2007) In fact, Charlie's success plays an important role on Karim's construction of his identity, and his success is apparently inseparable from his keen sense of the trend of the times and the ability to adapt society. When the readers read these parts, they will in their own minds construct the possible world of British society changes and cognitive development about the 1960s and 1970s, and the novel reproduces the characteristics of the times when it was post-colonialism and pinnacle cultural trends. The readers combined relevant background knowledge with their experience to believe that popular music reflecting the times is possible and that the characters of the novel including Karim, Eva, Charlie and so on loved and imitated the popular music, then the possible worlds about the features of British era is set up so that the readers can better understand and appreciate the novel.

V. CONCLUSION

The Buddha of Suburbia describes survival and living status of the India-Pakistan immigrants and their descendants in London in the post-colonial era. After trying to explore internal structure of the novel, that is, analyzing the wish and fantasy worlds of the main characters in the novel and plot development (the conflicts between wish or fantasy world and the real world), the author of this article finds that in the process of reading the novel the readers can construct the possible worlds of the protagonist Karim who is a representative of the Indian immigrants encountering such multiple themes as identity confusion, racial discrimination, characteristic elements of the era.

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