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**URBANIZATION AND INTERNET LITERATURE: ZHANG JIAJIA AND HIS
HEALING STORY**

A Thesis Presented

By

SHAYUE QI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Chinese

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HEALING STORY

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I truly feel grateful to have the opportunity writing a thesis. It is a painful but very interesting process. It helped me explore one more corner of the world, and the whole process built up a great foundation for my future.

ABSTRACT

URBANIZATION AND INTERNET LITERATURE: ZHANG JAIJIA AND HIS

HEALING STORY

MAY 2020

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In 2013, Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳's book *I Belonged to You* (从你的全世界路过; thereafter *Belonged*) became a huge hit and a miracle of publication. In 2013 after half a year in circulation, the paper print sold more than 2,000,000 copies and was soon adapted to two movies. In 2014, both the kindle and paper edition of *Belonged* won No.1 for the best books list on Amazon China. Zhang Jiajia's incredible success is a miracle, and it can only happen with the easy access of Internet. In addition to that, the lifestyle *Belonged* depicts is what post-80s and post-90s generations in China are experiencing now. My thesis studies how the Internet and Sina Weibo platform make the popularity of *Belonged* possible and why post-80s and post-90s readers from Sina Weibo like this kind of story. By investigating the reasons behind this book's popularity, I argue that Internet literature and literary works in a similar genre to *Belonged* fulfill the emotional needs of post-80s and post-90s generations, which the literature works written by writers who receive government stipends cannot meet.

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INTRODUCTION

Zhang Jiajia born in Jiangsu, China and attended Nanjing University from 1999 to 2003, where he studied information management. Although he was enrolled in the school of science, Zhang loves literature and plays. During his college years, Zhang founded several student organizations and wrote and directed plays; at the same time, he began writing stories online.

He started his internship in Nanjing TV station since his sophomore year.¹ Because of his experience, he worked as the TV program director for Nanjing TV station and Jiangsu TV station after graduation.² In 2005, he published his first book, *Almost Become a Hero* (几乎成了英雄).³ He started publishing *Young couple fights everyday* (小夫妻天天恶战) online in 2007,⁴ the book became very popular at that time. Zhang claimed that the serial posts were reposted more than 100,000 times after published six days.⁵ Some of *Belonged* readers also commented under Zhang's Weibo post and said

¹ Ye Mishan 叶弥杉, "Zuojia|Zhang Jiajia Rensheng ru chenchuan, woyao kaoziji youshanglai 作家|张嘉佳 人生如沉船，我要靠自己游上来 [writer|Zhang Jiajia life is like a shipwreck, and I need to surface by myself]," Renwu zhoukan, Nanfang renwu zhoukan, last modified January 3, 2018, <https://nfpeople.infzm.com/article/2675>.

² Baidu, "Baidu baike-Zhang Jiajia 百度百科-张嘉佳 [Baidu Encyclopedia-Zhang Jiajia]," Baidu Baike, Baidu, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/张嘉佳>.

³ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, *Jihu chengle yingxiong* 几乎成了英雄 [Almost Became a Hero] (Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2005).

⁴ This book is published online only, and the original website cannot be found.

⁵ Baidu, "Baidu baike-xiaofuqi tiantian ezhan 百度百科-小夫妻天天恶战 [Baidu Encyclopedia-young couple fights everyday]," Baidu Baike, Baidu, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/小夫妻天天恶战>.

that they recognized him as the author of *Young couple fights everyday*. In 2009, Zhang published his second book, *Lover's Book* (情人书).⁶

In 2011, Zhang wrote the film script, *The Butcher, the Chef and the Swordsman* (刀见笑),⁷ and the movie adaptation won the Golden Horse Award. Zhang received the nomination for best adapted movie. From July 2013, Zhang started posting the *Belonged* short story series on Sina Weibo 新浪微博. This series is named “bedtime story” (shuiqian gushi 睡前故事) because Zhang Jiajia usually posts the story before he goes to sleep each night. As the definition of bedtime story is different in the USA where it is referred to specifically as a children’s story, I will call them “stories before bedtime.” The author is aware of the healing feature of the story series and keeps those stories in a similar style. His work have gradually gained enormous attention through Sina Weibo, and he have gained enormous amount of new followers on Sina Weibo every day.

In 2013, the paper print was published and sold more than four million copies, breaking the single-volume fiction sale record in China. Within half a year, *Belonged* had sold two million copies (Zhu, Wang, 2015).⁸ As of the writing of this thesis, *Belonged* has been adapted into two films, and more movies are in the works. The second film, *See*

⁶ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, *Qingren shu* 情人书 [Lover's Book] (Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2009).

⁷ *Dao jian xiao* 刀见笑 [The Butcher, the Chef and the Swordsman], directed by Ershan Wu 乌尔善 (2010; Beijing: China Film Publish and Screen Branch Company and Dadi Shidai Dianyingfaxing Youxiangongsi, 2011), DVD.

⁸ Zhu Qiang and Wang Guisu 朱强 王贵苏, “Zhiyuxi zuopin: Qingnian xinli tiaoshi de bieyang tujing 治愈系”作品: 青年心理调适的别样途径 [‘Healing’ work: Another Way to Adjust Youth’s Metalilty],” *Zhongguo qingnian yanjiu* 中国青年研究, no.9 (2015): 31-36.

You Tomorrow (摆渡人),⁹ came out at the end of 2016 and was adapted and directed by Zhang Jijia himself.

In a very short period of time, Zhang Jijia went from being an almost unknown playwright and writer to suddenly becoming very popular as a famous writer, movie director, and TV Show host for the show, *If You Are the One* (非诚勿扰).¹⁰ Based on Chinese movie and literature website Douban 豆瓣网,¹¹ Zhang's second movie, *See You Tomorrow*, is rated 4/10 with more than 150,000 ratings. While the movie may be mediocre,¹² the total number rating (more than 150,000, one user can only rate one time) renders it quite clear that even after three years Zhang Jijia and his work still attract quite a bit of public attention.¹³

⁹ *Baidu ren* 摆渡人 [See You Tomorrow], directed by Zhang Jijia 张嘉佳 (2016; Hong Kong: Mei Ah Entertainment Group Co., Ltd and UA Films, 2017). DVD.

¹⁰ This TV Show is produced by Hunan Television and can be watched nationwide. In 2/10/2018, the audience rating is 0.802%.

¹¹ Douban: <https://www.douban.com>. It is a website that was founded in 2005. The website is initially designed to: first, make people rate books, music and movies; second, help people identify and join the community that shares similar interests with them. In this website, users can mark books, music and movies that they want to watch or watched. Users are able to rate from one star to five stars and leave short/long comments on the movie they watched. In 2009, registered users on Douban reach 10,000,000. Now Douban has 160,000,000 registered users and each month there are activated users around 300,000,000.

¹² Douban, "Baiduren 摆渡人," Douban Movie, Douban, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://movie.douban.com/subject/25911694/>.

¹³ Douban's movie rating section has a huge influence of box office. Based on a 2015's study, adding one star of a movie in Douban, in average a theatre can make 350,000 Yuan more from box office.

Because of the book's particular popularity, there are four versions of paperback published in mainland China within six years, including: 1) *I Belonged to You* (print version);¹⁴ 2) *I Belonged to You-Hardcover* (upgrade version);¹⁵ 3) *I Belonged to You-See You Tomorrow* (commemorative version);¹⁶ and 4) *I belonged to You* (revised version).¹⁷ The content of each version is slightly different. For example, in the hardcover version that was published in 2014, there are eight chapters instead of seven, which means there are six more stories in this version. In my thesis, I use the earliest version published in November 2013 to conduct my study. This is the first version that was published after Zhang's story have become famous online.

Belonged has some unique features that contribute to its popularity. The most unique feature is that stories in *Belonged* are simultaneously connected to and also independent from one another. Some characters appear in several of the stories in the book, but usually they are protagonists in only one story. Their other appearances are as supporting characters. Most characters are acquaintances with the main protagonist, Zhang Jiajia, who shares the same name of the book author. In one interview, Zhang

¹⁴ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, *Cong nide quanshijie luguo* 从你的全世界路过 [I Belonged to You] (Hunan: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2013).

¹⁵ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, *Cong nide quanshijie luguo: jingzhuang shengjiban* 从你的全世界路过：精装升级版 [I Belonged to You-hardcover upgrade version] (Hunan: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2014).

¹⁶ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, *Cong nide quanshijie luguo-baiduren diancangban* 从你的全世界路过-摆渡人典藏版 [I Belonged to You-See You Tomorrow commemorate version] (Hunan: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2016).

¹⁷ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, *Cong nide quanshijie luguo-xiudingben* 从你的全世界路过-修订本 [I Belonged to You-Revised Version] (Hunan: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2019).

explained that he tried to write those short stories like fast-paced movies.¹⁸ As a result, the narrative mostly focuses on important plots, and transitions are always omitted. This feature is very important as Zhang posts each story in one Sina Weibo post. Additionally, in this book, stories are not arranged chronologically and do not follow story development sequence.

The book is divided into seven sections. Although the reason for this organization is not entirely clear, the sequence in the book must be intentional because the story sequence online is different from the sequence in the print version. Based on his earliest Sina Weibo post in 2012, Zhang Jiajia started writing the story before he published them online. As in his posts, he claimed, “today I am writing...,” and those contents appeared in stories in the book.¹⁹

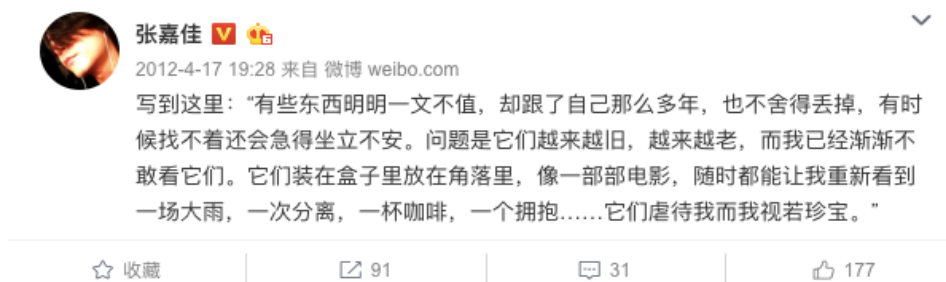


Figure 1. Sina Weibo post indicating Zhang’ writing progress (Zhang Jiajia Sina Weibo)

¹⁸ Hu Man 胡曼, “Zhang Jiajia: xiaolaing pobaiwan shujie daheima-ruhe ba “wujiecao”he xiaoqingxin jiajie chenghuo 张嘉佳: 销量破百万 书界大黑马-如何把”无节操”和小清新嫁接成活 [Zhang Jiajia: sales more than million, publishing dark horse-How to Graft Romance with Humor],” Sohu Culture, Sohu, last modified 2013, <http://cul.sohu.com/s2013/zhangjiajia/>.

¹⁹ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, “April 17, 2012 post,” Sina Weibo, Sina Weibo, last modified April 17, 2012, <https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/yf3vWA4WA?type=comment>.

Furthermore, some stories posted on Sina Weibo and published in *Belonged* were written and published through other online platforms prior. These stories include *Elder sister* (姐姐)²⁰ and *First love is one's chaos* (初恋是一个人的兵荒马乱).²¹ Both of these stories were first published in the online novel, *Young couple fights everyday*.

The main theme of *Belonged* is romantic love, but it contains stories about friendship, family, and pets as well. There are more than 150 characters in the book, among those characters, nine characters are mentioned in more than one story. As for the content, most of the 38 stories are realistic; a few stories are fantasy, allegory, and prose. The language is usually poetic, sometimes humorous. Zhang combines Nanjing dialect with cyberwords and is able to master the language and style very well. In each story, readers are moved with touching plots and laugh hard at sidesplitting dialogues. Although most of the stories are heartbroken, they carry strong healing functions. Characters' insistence of kindness, care, affection and hilarious plots provide a wonderful reading experience.

As in Shen's review of *Belonged*, these stories are facetious but full of life's major events and sentiments.²² In this way, it can be seen as an example of high-quality Internet literary work, and its popularity is not hard to understand. By describing those life-changing events in a heartwarming way, the book helps to heal its readers. As a matter of

²⁰ Zhang, *Belonged*, 141-160.

²¹ Zhang, 17-33.

²² Shen Wenjie 沈文捷, "cong 80hou de quanshijie luguo-Zhang Jiajia de "shuiqian gushi" jiexi 从80后的全世界路过-张嘉佳的"睡前故事"解析 [Pass by Post-80s Whole World-Zhang Jiajia's "Stories before Bedtime" Analysis]," *Zhongguo qingnian yanjiu* 中国青年研究, no.9 (2015): 27-30.

fact, Zhang is fully conscious of the healing function; he said in the book's preface, "I know, they (stories) can give some strength to people who (I) like, some strength to face themselves" (但我知道，它们能给喜欢的人一点点力量，一点点面对自己的力量).²³

In the preface, author Zhang Jiajia claimed that stories in *Belonged* are mostly about himself and his real-life friends. In the first preface, Zhang Jiajia wrote, "this book is like a friend who was talking to you about his/her life. And the friend is me" (像朋友在深夜跟你在叙述，叙述他走过的千山万水。这个朋友就是我).²⁴ Zhang stressed several times that essentially all stories in the book are his real-life stories. As the protagonist in the book has the same name of the author, readers have no difficulty reading them as Zhang's own experience. In the second preface, Zhang explained the meaning of the book title. He stressed, "I passed by someone's life, and some people passed by my life.... At some point of the past, we wanted to own someone's whole world. But we could only pass by" (我从一些人的世界路过，一些人从我的世界路过.....因为在过去的岁月，我们都会想去拥有一个人的全世界，可是只能路过).²⁵ As the title suggests, most characters in the book have experienced heartbreak. They suffered but were supported by friends and families, and some of them gained happiness in the end. In my opinion, the Internet exists as a way to promote the book contributes to the popularity of *Belonged*. In addition, Zhang Jiajia successfully recognized the needs of

²³ Zhang, *Belonged*, 1.

²⁴ Zhang, first preface.

²⁵ Zhang, 1.

his target audience. With his skilled writing, he is able to deliver caring and warmth to his audience.

Zhang Jiajia born in 1980, and he belongs to a unique generation. In 1978, the Chinese government set up the China Development and Opening up policy. Since then, China has experienced unbelievable development. The need of fast modernization process and economic reform led to policy changes, including the one-child policy and free market of employment and housing. For post-80s and post-90s generations who are raised and grow up under the new era, however, it is a completely different experience. The enrichment of daily life and popularization of the Internet make them a new generation that does not need to worry about necessities and has more access to information.²⁶ At the same time, they face a life that is totally different from their parents, so there is no precedent or experience to learn from. They have broader views comparing to their elders, but a changing society has created a totally different environment for them to adapt. They have to deal with the dynamic environment alone.

Because of drastic social change, generations of youth starting from 80s have distinctive characteristics and life experiences. The one-child policy and changes of society together create generations with unique traits and needs. On behalf of generations have grown up with these changes, Zhang Jiajia wrote a book to describe the characteristics and at the same time fulfill their emotional needs in contemporary society.

²⁶ Guo Meijie and Zhu Qiang 郭梅洁 朱强, “80hou de kuanghuan: qingnian dushi wenhua renting de linglei biao xian- 《cong nide quanshijie luguo》 de wenhua jiedu 80后的狂欢: 青年都市文化认同的另类表现- 《从你的全世界路过》的文化解读 [Post-80s revelry: acceptance of urban culture and its alternative expression],” *Zhongguo qingnian yanjiu* 中国青年研究, no.9 (2015): 22-26.

Belonged creates an Internet cultural phenomenon, and the work itself can be understood as a milestone of Internet literature that specially serves post-80s and post-90s generations. Zhang's work opens the way for writers in his wake to publish stories on Sina Weibo with the hashtag (#) "story before bedtime".

In this paper, I aim to pinpoint the reader group, study the role in healing of *Belonged*, and dig out the reasons for the popularity of *Belonged*. This paper focuses on four key points: 1) the demographic information of *Belonged*'s initial readers; 2) how Zhang's writing and publishing endeavor fits the platform—Sina Weibo; 3) how readers' participation promotes *Belonged* online; and 4) how *Belonged* carries out healing function for its readers. By exploring those four points, I work to find the reasons for *Belonged*'s popularity.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Belonged's huge success attracts scholars' attention. My thesis examines *Belonged* initial reader group, the promoting role of Internet, post-80s and post-90s and their emotional needs, and the book's healing function. In this way, I mainly focus on studies that include those subjects. In the studies I reviewed, scholars explore the connection between *Belonged* and the post-80s generation. They argue that Zhang Jiajia belongs to post-80s generation and he writes this generation's stories, and those stories reach the right audiences. Although most studies adopt a similar approach, different studies focus on different aspects.

Because of one-child policy and China urbanization, generations since 1980s in China form their own youth culture. Therefore, youth culture is studied to understand how *Belonged* is able to represent generations since 80s. Guo and Zhu's research conducts on urban culture presented in *Belonged*.²⁷ The research mainly focuses on urban culture and how urban culture is accepted by the post-80s generation. There are four points discussed in the paper as the representation of urban culture: 1) bar and drinking culture; 2) food and travel; 3) college life-brotherhood and romantic love; and 4) game and Internet. The research analyzes the characteristics of post-80s generation. The authors conclude that as the first generation under single-child policy and one that lives under stress, readers from post-80s generation are able to relate to stories in *Belonged*. This conclusion is accurate, but there is a problem with the result from this study.

²⁷ Guo and Zhu, Post-80s revelry, 22-26.

Different from the scholars' claims, long novels are very common in Chinese Internet literature, and they are actually very popular. Because of the earning mechanism, longer Internet fictions can make more money for the writer because of the VIP payment system. Readers need to pay chapter by chapter to read the certain story. In order to benefit more from one fiction, writers always try to write the fiction as long as they can while making the story highly intriguing. The claim that *Belonged* as a short story collection fits with Chinese Internet literature readers' general reading habits is not accurate. This study fails to differentiate Chinese Internet genre fictions and other Internet literature works like *Belonged*.

Shi's study concentrates on youth culture.²⁸ The study focuses on youth cultural phenomenon and how *Belonged* is able to provide comfort to the post-80s generation. In the study, youth cultural phenomenon is defined as culture matters that can represent youth. It should be intuitive, characteristic, and timely. Shi argues that cultural identity is important for people to feel accepted by the society. In Shi's work, cultural identity is defined as a collective consciousness which is generated through interaction, it is a product of modern society. Shi argues that along with the social economic development, youth culture have changed from community to individuality, from singleness to pluralism, from idealism to utilitarianism. Because of these drastic changes, people from post-80s generation have trouble finding a consistent cultural identity. In this way, *Belonged* depicts ordinary people's lives and their insistence on pursuing true love and

²⁸ Shi Yu 时昱, "Cong shei de quanshijie luguo?-dangdai zhongguo qingnian de jiazhi goujian yu wenhua xuanze 从谁的全世界路过?-当代中国青年的价值建构与文化选择 [Pass by whose world?-Contemporary Chinese Youth's value buildup and culture choice]," *Zhongguo Qingnian Yanjiu* 中国青年研究, no.9 (2015): 5-9.

persisting in moral value; it brings hope to its readers and reconfirms their self-identity. The conclusion is accurate, but this study does not provide a clear definition of post-80s cultural identity or self-identity.

In addition, Shi's study discusses Internet literature and new media. Shi talks about how Weibo Literature becomes a cultural phenomenon and how the "neo media" changes the culture at the same time. Shi describes Weibo Literature as "non-threshold literature." By using the neo media, authors can publish their works without any standard and readers can access the literature anytime and anywhere they want. But there are some obvious problems in the study. Shi claims that *Belonged*'s short stories are published in 140 characters on Sina Weibo, which is not correct. This study also claims a similar point of short article reading habits as Guo and Zhu's study.

The healing function *Belonged* carries play an important role for its popularity. Most studies analyze the book's healing feature from psychological perspective. Shen's study examines the psychological feature of post-80s and their psychological needs. This study claims that with the development of society, people's life becomes fragmented. Meanwhile, economic growth and social structure changes increase pressure on generations grow up in these changes. In this way, the post-80s generation in China needs imminent psychological support. Under this circumstance, the short stories in *Belonged* fit perfectly with post-80s generation's psychological needs. But Shen fails to explain how *Belonged* fits post-80s generation's psychological needs. It is important to note that in this study, Shen states that Zhang Jiajia provides solutions to readers, which is the

opposite of what the book expressed.²⁹ Rather, the healing result is not carried out by self-indulgence, but due to love and caring expressed throughout the book.

Xuan and Wang focus on youth psychology as well.³⁰ This study examines youth psychology and how *Belonged* fits the psychological need of the youth. The authors argue that during puberty, youth experience certain psychological changes and the gap between ideal and reality causes the painful feeling. *Belonged* has certain expressions that fit to youth psychological need and can help them express feelings that they are not able to express by themselves. The authors also stress that Zhang Jijia does not give solutions in the book. Instead, Zhang suggests that everything will be fine, and time will heal everything. Furthermore, the study affirms that detailed descriptions of alcohol consumption, travel and food, and college life resonate with post-80s readers and give them a way to divert from painful feelings to something beautiful or untroubled. Xuan and Wang's study claims that *Belonged* empathizes with its readers. These together make *Belonged* popular among post-80s generation. But in *Belonged*, stories are not all dedicated to describing youth's life experience. Most stories are about adult life, and these stories contain many complicated experiences and emotions.

The promoting role Internet plays is very important for *Belonged*. *Belonged* is published through online social media platform Sina Weibo, and because of its fast distribution and popularity, *Belonged* is published in four versions of paperbacks and

²⁹ Zhang, *Belonged*, 292.

³⁰ Xuan Zheng and Wang Yuxiang 玄铮 王玉香, "Huiwang yu gongming: "Zhang Jijia xianxiang" de xinlixue jixi" 回望与共鸣：“张嘉佳现象”的心理学解析 [Looking back and resonating: "Zhang Jijia phenomenon" and its psychological analysis]," *Zhongguo qingnian yanjiu* 中国青年研究, no.9 (2015): 16-21.

adapted to two movies. Among all studies, there is one study conducted by scholar Shan that analyzes we media and literature.³¹ In this study, we media is defined as social media platforms such as blog, and microblog that allow information transmission become spontaneous, immediate, and interactive. This study uses Zhang Jiajia as an example to discuss how “we media” influences the contemporary literature. Shan argues that we media literature can be seen as culture product wherein the users (audiences) are the center of action. Under this concept, *Belonged* is the best example of cultural product. The *Belonged* book title was chosen online by readers through a Sina Weibo poll by Zhang Jiajia’s followers. In this way, we media creates a new way for novice writers to publish their works and draw attention. At the same time, the writing process and the works are totally different from traditional literary works; it is made to adjust to the media as well as its audiences. We media turns Internet literature readers to audiences and makes them involve in commercial activities. Shan argues that new media always creates new ways for literature publication, and it influences the genre and content. Although this study touches up some points I will study in my thesis, this paper is not focused on *Belonged*, and there is not enough in-depth investigation of how *Belonged* reaches its popularity.

Although all studies bring up some important issues, there are some clear problems. First, scholars fail to recognize the actual form of *Belonged*’s initial publication by claiming that the stories are published in 140 characters each time through Sina

³¹ Shan Xin 单昕, “Zimeiti xiezuoyu dangdai wenxue shengtai de shanbian-yi Zhang Jiajia de “shuiqian gushi” weili 自媒体写作与当代文学生态的嬗变-以张嘉佳的“睡前故事”为例 [Self-media Writing and the Change of Contemporary Literature-with Zhang Jiajia’s “bedtime story” as the example],” *Dangdai Wentan* 当代文坛, no.4 (2017): 144-147.

Weibo. Second, no work provides a cogent study of the reader community. Scholars seem to assume that the biggest reader group is from post-80s generation. For *Belonged*, the initial reader community is very important, and an inconclusive study will influence the comprehensiveness of the work, as well as the phenomenon. Third, most studies combine certain social topics with *Belonged* and come up with the conclusion about why it is popular. However, no study seems to pay close attention to the work and the promoting role of Internet.

In my thesis, I conduct thorough study to explore the reason behind *Belonged's* popularity. In the second chapter of my thesis, I use the China Internet Network Information Center (thereafter CNNIC) report and the Sina Weibo annual report to study *Belonged* initial reader group. Information and data are drawn from these two reports to find out the initial readers' demographic information. In addition to the demographic information, I focus on Chinese Internet literature history and development. *Belonged* is first published online, it falls within the category of Internet literature. I will first introduce the history of Chinese Internet literature, and then compare *Belonged's* publishing style with other Chinese Internet literature works to illustrate how *Belonged* gets popular through Sina Weibo and why Sina Weibo is the best platform to publish *Belonged*. In the third chapter, I mainly concentrate on *Belonged's* value to the readers. *Belonged's* readers are different from the traditional book readers. They are readers, and most importantly, they are fans. Readers' participation adds significance to the book. In the first part of the third chapter, I analyze how reader behavior spreads and promotes the book. On this basis, I examine the relation of fans behavior and *Belonged's* popularity. After study readers participation and how it contributes to *Belonged*, I investigate how

one-child policy and China urbanization influence *Belonged* readers, and I illustrate how *Belonged* carries out healing function. In this part, I used readers' comments and reviews from Sina Weibo and Douban. Sina Weibo is the initial publishing platform of *Belonged*, and Douban is the most popular book/movie review website in China. After studying the healing function of *Belonged*, I analyze how author Zhang Jiajia uses different strategies to build up a closer relationship with readers and how it helps to carry out the healing function.

CHAPTER 2

INTERNET AND *BELONGED*

2.1 Introduction

The Internet provides an effective publishing platform for *Belonged*. In this chapter, I explore how Internet and platform facilitate *Belonged*'s popularity. In the first part, I examine the demographic information of *Belonged*'s initial readers, the result provides vital information to understand why Sina Weibo is the best platform to publish *Belonged*. In the second part, I dive into the history and development of Chinese Internet literature. By studying the history and development of Internet literature in China, the position of *Belonged* among Internet literary works will be clear. In the third part of this chapter, I investigate the characteristics of Sina Weibo, Zhang Jiajia' publishing behavior, and compare *Belonged*'s publishing platform and style with other Internet literary works. In this way, I will learn why Sina Weibo is the best platform for *Belonged*'s publishing, and how Zhang Jiajia successfully adapts the stories to the platform. By knowing *Belonged*'s initial readers' demographic information, *Belonged*'s position among Chinese Internet literary works, and why Sina Weibo is the best platform to publish the stories, I am able to have a full understanding of how Internet and platform facilitate *Belonged*'s popularity.

2.2 Sina Weibo Users

Because *Belonged* is first published on Sina Weibo, its users are the initial readers and fans of the book. Studying the initial readers' and fans' characteristics can provide information that can support further studies. Based on the 2013 Sina report, post-90s is

the biggest age group that uses Sina Weibo.³² This group takes 53% of Sina Weibo users, and post-80s takes 37%. In total, post-80s and post-90s users make up 90% of total Sina Weibo users. In addition, most Weibo users have earned higher education degrees. Users who have received a high school diploma and higher education degrees represent 70.8% of viewership.³³ Based on the 2013 CNNIC report, compare to Wechat and other social media users, Weibo users are younger, with higher education and lower income.³⁴ As Sina Weibo is the most popular Weibo platform in China, this data applies to Sina Weibo, too. Sina Weibo users also tend to add friends and interact with users of similar ages (± 2 years) and professions.³⁵ Based on this information, in 2013, most Sina Weibo users were born between 1980 to 1999, received higher education, and had a lower income. Those users might just start to work or are still in school.

2.3 History and Development of Chinese Internet Literature

Internet literature has a long history in China, and it has become quite popular over time. Based on the CNNIC report from 2013, Internet literature users have reached 374 million in 2013, which was 44.4% of all netizens at that time,³⁶ presenting an

³² Sina, “2013nian yonghu fazhan baogao 2013年用户发展报告 [2013 Sina Weibo Users development report],” Weibo Report, Sina Weibo Statistics center, last modified January, 2014, <http://data.weibo.com/report/reportDetail?id=76>. 5.

³³Sina, 2013 Sina report, 6.

³⁴ CNNIC, “zhongguo shejiaolei yingyong yonghu xingwei yanjiu baogao 中国社交类应用用户行为研究报告 [The 33rd CNNIC Social media user behavior Statistic report],” CNNIC, CNNIC, last modified January, 2014, <http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwzbg/hlwtjbg/201403/P020140305346585959798.pdf>. 5.

³⁵ Sina, 2013 Sina report, 38.

³⁶ CNNIC, The 33rd CNNIC report, 45.

enormous usage rate. In China, the Internet provides an alternative way for novice writers to publish their work. It is free and relatively straightforward to publish written works online. Before delving into an introduction to the history of Chinese Internet literature, I will begin by defining Internet literature in general.

In countries where print publishing is relatively free, Internet literature works are usually those that heavily depend upon Internet or Internet platform; these include interactive fiction or those genres of writing that are not aimed at mass publication (e.g., slash fiction). In China, the book publishing process is painstaking, both for literature magazines and print books. All literary works that want to be published in print need to pass the strict censorship system. In addition to the censorship, there are not many literature magazines to choose from, and all books need a book number (ISBN) to be published. The distribution of book number is controlled by the nation-run publishers, which cannot be purchased by individual. At the same time, private publishing and distribution can cause legal problems. For a new writer, it is very difficult to publish a literary work in print, the work needs to fit certain styles and aesthetic standard, pass through the censorship, and successfully obtain a book number. Those authors who want to write something different are generally not able to find a place to publish beyond the Internet. In this way, literature amateurs have begun to exploring new methods for publishing online. Because of the restriction of print book publishing, in China, Internet literature essentially includes all types of literature, not only the popular genre fictions, but also poems, proses, serious literature, and popular fiction. Internet is the most accessible platform for writers to publish freely. In the current book publishing market, Internet has become the test field. Those authors with works that are already popular

online have a higher likelihood of being able to obtain a book number and get published in paper print because their popularity is the profit-making guarantee for publishers.

When it comes to Internet literature in China, most people's first impression is genre fiction because of the popularity of Internet genre fiction websites and its whole industry. In my study, Internet literature represents all literary works that are originally published online and are not limited to genre fictions.

Theoretically, all online platforms that can post text are potential platforms for literature; however, the desire to share stories with others makes social-oriented platforms more ideal. The freeness and openness of Internet publishing platforms creates an opportunity for literature fans to share their works to a broad public and also to form different literature communities online.

When Internet users were first publishing literary works online, there was no platform dedicated to literature, so works were published through different social media platforms. As those works were open to be read, they could reach a broad audience and allow the writer to gain feedback and advice that can encourage to continue writing and help them on the path of growing as an author. Because of the growing popularity of Internet literature, some online platforms, such like forums and bulletin board systems (thereafter BBS), have started to create literature sections. In the wake of this shift in practice, personal blogs have also become a popular venue for writers. Personal blogs have not yet become a way for amateur writers to gain attention, because compare to forums and BBS, personal blog is less interactive.

The huge demand for Internet literature platforms has spawned Internet literature websites. Literature websites fully dedicate to literature publishing and literary works

critics, it is an online platform for amateur writers publishing all different types of works, and the main purpose is not profit-making and paper book publishing. Some literature websites have gained wide attention. Many authors' written works have been published online and read by both registered users and non-registered visitors. Some works eventually are published in paper print, and some writers gain their reputation and start their professional career.

With the development of online business, people have gradually begun to realize that the role of Internet is not just an information center; it is also a great place to make money. Valuable information, non-material products, and attention all can be transferred into profit. Under the development of Internet literature and online business, Internet genre fiction websites have been developed, a system which is still popular across China. However, the popularity of genre literature websites does not totally "kill" other different literature platforms, as they all carry different functions. Douban Read 豆瓣阅读 is part of Douban website, and it is dedicated to providing a platform for Douban users to write and read new works with no limitation of genre. Some works need to be paid for in order to read. Jianshu 简书网 is a community-style writing platform. An author can publish for free and get paid by readers' reward. Furthermore, Wechat public account 微信公众号 is an attractive platform to publish a written work, too. After the general history, I will introduce some important literature platforms in mainland China and their iconic Internet literary works that can represent Chinese Internet literature history milestones.

The first broadly recognized Internet literary work is *First Intimate Contact* (第一次的亲密接触)³⁷ that published on a Taiwan BBS platform. It is later reposted by a mainland reader on a mainland China BBS platform. The popularity of *First Intimate Contact* in mainland China promotes BBS platforms' popularity there. Currently, BBS platform continues to be an effective platform for online literature publishing. There are several famous writers who have made a name for themselves through Tianya BBS 天涯论坛. These authors include Dangnianmingyue 当年明月 with *Affairs Happened in Ming Dynasty* (明朝那些事)³⁸ and Murongxuecun 慕容雪村 with *Chengdu, Please Forget Me Tonight* (成都，今夜请将我遗忘).³⁹

Baidu Tieba 百度贴吧 is a popular BBS platform in mainland China, and has some favored writers, too. For instance, there is a very popular post on Baidu Leukaemia Tieba called *Writing a memoir before death* (死前写个回忆录),⁴⁰ which is written by A Bu 阿布, a terminal leukemia patient. His work became so famous, that everyday Tieba users would keep checking on his updates. The post was also reposted by a follower on

³⁷ Cai Zhiheng 蔡志恒, *Diyicide qinmi jiechu* 第一次的亲密接触 [First intimate contact] (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1999).

³⁸ Dangnianmingyue 当年明月, *Mingchao naxieshi* 明朝那些事 [Affairs happened in Ming Dynasty] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2011).

³⁹ Murongxuecun 慕容雪村, *Chengdu, jinye qingjiangwo yiwang* 成都，今夜请将我遗忘 [Chengdu, please forget me tonight] (Shanxi: Beiyu Wenyi Publishing House, 2002).

⁴⁰ A Bu 阿布, "Siqian xiege huiyilu 死前写个回忆录 [Writing a memoir before death]," Baidu Tieba, Baidu, accessed February 22, 2020, <http://tieba.baidu.com/p/1179854832?pn=1>.

Tianya BBS. Eventually A Bu passed away, but his posts were published in paper print as *A Life Being Reset* (被重置的人生) in 2016.⁴¹

In 2005, the first personal blog platform was established in China.⁴² Numerous public figures started writing their own blogs, including Han Han 韩寒 and Xu Jinglei 徐静蕾. In addition to personal blogs, literature websites became very popular in China at that time, and eventually become the mainstream. There are two types of literature websites, which are divided by the use of VIP payment system(VIP 付费制度). The most prestigious purely literature website is Banyan Tree 榕树下. It was founded in December 1997 and was still active until recently.⁴³ Banyan Tree was originally established by Zhu Weilian 朱威廉 as his personal website. In 1999, he founded a company, changed the website to a public literature website, and welcomed writers to publish their works on it. The famous writer Qingshan 庆山 (former name: Anni Baobei 安妮宝贝) earned her fame and the first group of loyal fans through this website, as did Ningcaishen 宁财神, who wrote the well-known TV series, *My own swardsman* (武林外传).⁴⁴ In addition to these authors, there is a writer called Lu Youqing 陆幼青 who published his diary style

⁴¹ A Bu 阿布, *Bei chongzhi de rensheng* 被重置的人生 [A life being reset] (Nanjing: Yilin chubanshe, 2016).

⁴² Michel Hockx, "Internet Literature in China: history, technology, and conventions," in *Internet Literature in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 24-58.

⁴³ There is no announcement or news about the close of Banyan Tree website, but I tried to access the website around November 2019. After several attempts, the website cannot open.

⁴⁴ *Wulin waizhuan* 武林外传 [My own swardsman], directed by Shang Jing 尚敬, written by Ningcaishen 宁财神, Cheng Jiao'e 程娇娥, aired January 2, 2006, in broadcast syndication, Beijing Union Film Investment&Shang Jing's Studio, 2011, DVD.

book *Date with Death* (生命的留言)⁴⁵ on Banyan Tree, writing about his life and experience with terminal cancer. This is the first well-known book that writing about the experience of having terminal disease. Banyan Tree is a very welcome literature platform that has supported numerous writers and resulted in the publication of several well-loved works. There are other purely literature websites in China, but none of them are as popular and successful as Banyan Tree.

As for genre fiction websites, Starting Point 起点中文网 is the first website to create the VIP payment system. Not long after Starting Point website created the payment system, several other genre literature websites adapted similar payment systems. This has become the majority of Chinese Internet literature business, and an entire culture industry is built upon it. From online publishing and copyright sharing to paper book publishing, TV drama, and game adapting, Internet literature websites attract big corporations as well as genre literature amateurs to join in the field. Popular genre fiction works including *My Sunshine* (何以笙箫默),⁴⁶ *Scarlet Heart* (步步惊心),⁴⁷ and *Empresses in the Palace* (甄嬛传).⁴⁸ Because of the enormous profit, there are only a little attention paid to other types of Internet literary works.

⁴⁵ Lu Youqing 陆幼青, *Shengming de liuyan* 生命的留言 [Date with death] (Beijing: Huayi chubanshe, 2000).

⁴⁶ Gu Man 顾漫, *Heyi Shengxiaomo* 何以笙箫默 [My Sunshine] (Beijing: Zhaohua chubanshe, 2007). Adapted to TV series on 2015.

⁴⁷ Tong Hua 桐华, *Bubu Jingxin* 步步惊心 [Scarlet Heart] (Beijing: Haiyang chubanshe, 2006). Adapted to TV series on 2011.

⁴⁸ Liulian Zi 流潋紫, *Hougong Zhenhuan Zhuan* 后宫甄嬛传 [Empresses in the Palace] (Hebei: Huashan Wenyi chubanshe, 2007). Adapted to TV series on 2011 and imported by HBO.

Although all of these literature platforms are very popular and attract high numbers of users, they share a similar problem: they are designed for literature only. The narrow focus of the literature website naturally limits the audience, and for writers, the competition is huge. Some writers choose to publish on traditional platforms such as BBS or forums, while others try to explore new platforms in the hopes of becoming successful, for example, Zhang Jiajia. Worth noticing, emergence of new literature platforms always promotes new writers and writing styles. In the next section, I will introduce the relatively new literature publishing platform-Sina Weibo, and how Zhang's adapt his stories to this social media platform.

2.4 Sina Weibo and Zhang Jiajia's Publishing Behavior

In 1994, The High Energy Physics Research Institute at the Chinese Academy of Sciences set up the first Internet server in China. This event is marked by Chinese government as the beginning of Chinese Internet.⁴⁹ These days with fast Internet speed, the content propagated online keeps changing, from text-based blogs and forum to the photo and video platforms; more recently, vlog⁵⁰ has become the new trend. Although users' online habits have shifted with the emergence of new platforms, some platforms still remain popular. In 2009, Sina, Tencent, and other websites started launching microblog websites. Surviving despite the rising competition, Sina Weibo has become the most popular microblog platform in China. With continuing Internet development, Sina

⁴⁹ Jeremy Goldkorn, "The Internet 互联网," Australian Centre of China in the World, Australian Centre of China in the World, last modified August 2, 2012, <https://www.thechinastory.org/keyword/the-internet/>.

⁵⁰ Vlog, video blog or video log.

Weibo platform adds new features while updating its original functions to keep old users and attract new people to register. Because of this response to the dynamic Internet, Sina Weibo contains a variety of functions and the platform has become socially interactive. In Wikipedia, Weibo was defined as a mixture of Twitter and Facebook.⁵¹ Sina Weibo is thriving. Based on survey data from Alexa Internet,⁵² there are 15 Chinese websites listed in the 50 most popular websites around the world, and the only Chinese social network website on the list is Sina Weibo. It ranks 20 in the top 50 most popular global websites.

In 2013, Sina Weibo have already become one of the most popular Internet platforms in China, but the long article publishing function was not launched yet. Though the huge user base and the content-sharing mechanism made Sina Weibo a great platform to gain attention, with 140 characters limits of each post it is hard to imagine how to make Sina Weibo an effective literature publishing platform. But Zhang Jiajia have found the best way. Instead of publishing part of story in each post, Zhang Jiajia choose to use long-picture posts to publish full stories each time. The long-picture post is actually a long and narrow rectangular picture. It is a way to put an article or a series of pictures in one picture.

⁵¹ Wikipedia, "Wikipedia-Sina Weibo," Sina Weibo, Wikipedia, last modified October 15, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sina_Weibo&oldid=864102441.

⁵² Wikipedia, "List of most popular websites," Wikipedia, Alexa Internet, last modified August 23, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_popular_websites.

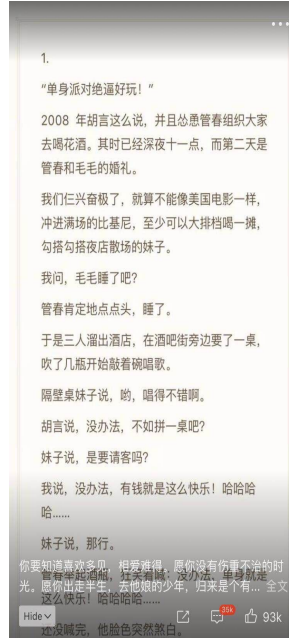


Figure 2. Sina Weibo cellphone application long-picture post screenshot (Zhang Jiajia Sina Weibo)

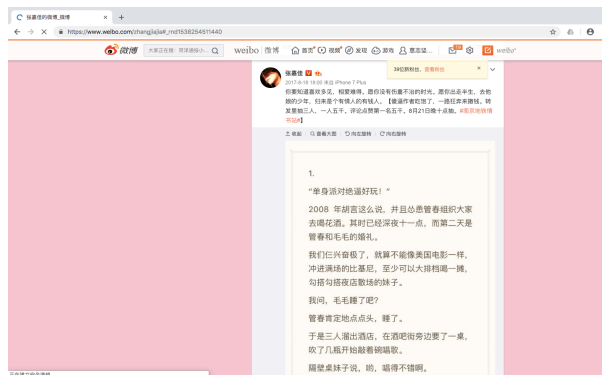


Figure 3. Sina Weibo Webpage Screenshot for the same content (Zhang Jiajia Sina Weibo)

Long-picture post is very popular on Sina Weibo and is used more often than long article publishing function currently. Because of this, there are several applications that have been developed to generate this type of picture to be posted through Sina Weibo.



Figure 4. Weibo Long picture post generating tool (Google search: 微博长图工具)

The fact is that Zhang Jiajia posted blogs on the microblog platform. There are some apparent advantages for doing this. Compare to blog platforms, microblog platforms are socially oriented, and popular content can be shared through the broad public. If Zhang chose to publish on traditional literature platforms, he needed to find the platform that fits to his writing style and will face huge competition. In addition to that, most literature websites have copyright protection, which means distributing the work to other websites might be illegal. This prevents the work to be spread across different platforms. By publishing through Sina Weibo, Zhang avoids those problems and gets his work widely spread. Zhang explained the reason of publishing on Sina Weibo in one interview, saying he chose Sina Weibo because there are lots of limitations of publishing through paper media, and he just wanted a place that he can share his stories for free.⁵³

The long-picture post is a very smart tactic to cater Sina Weibo users' habit. By publishing a complete story in each post, Zhang successfully adapted his stories to the Sina Weibo platform and reached the potential readers. In addition to that, as all stories

⁵³ Hu, Graft Romance with Humor.

are related but not serialized, users can pick up any story and start reading, it will not matter where to start or where to stop. Based on Sina Weibo report, in 2013, 76% of users accessed Weibo by mobile device applications, and there were only 29% of users navigated via webpage daily.⁵⁴ As the report claims, using a cellphone for online reading is very common. Novels and other literary works that only need short amount of time to read and are adjusted to fit a small screen are popular among mobile device users.⁵⁵ Based on the CNNIC report result, long-picture story posts fit perfectly to smart phone reading and sharing. As a result of above study, Zhang is able to cater to the Sina Weibo users' habits by publishing before bedtime.

Based on 2013 Sina Weibo report, the peak traffic time for using Sina Weibo was after 8 a.m.; 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.; 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.; and the highest peak was from 10 p.m. to 11 p.m.⁵⁶ During this time, most people use their cellphone to browse online. It is time to relax and get ready to sleep. After publishing those stories for a while, Zhang started publishing those stories between 10 p.m. to 12 a.m. with the hashtag (#)storybeforebedtime. Those stories have healing features, and the length of each story is perfect for reading for a short time before going to sleep.

Zhang's stories are adult bedtime stories. Each of Zhang's stories is around 3,000 characters, which will take about five to ten minutes to read. If a person chooses to share one of the stories, it is highly possible that it will be read by many other people before they go to sleep that night or when they first get up the next morning. Although it is

⁵⁴ Sina, 2013 Sina report, 8.

⁵⁵ CNNIC, 33rd CNNIC report, 55.

⁵⁶ Sina, 2013 Sina report, 8.

possible to generate a long picture with a much longer story, it is easy for readers to lose interest and it is very possible that readers will accidentally close the picture and not be able to find it again in order to continue reading. With the nature of the Internet realm, it is challenging to convince Internet users to dedicate a long, uninterrupted time for any one platform. In addition, serializing a story over several days will not help reading and sharing either. If it is the first time for someone to read Zhang's story, a half story will not be able to make a good first impression, let alone encourage the person to share it. If published in a different way, it would greatly reduce the content sharing and the writer's exposure on Sina Weibo.

Zhang Jijia is not the first writer to post their work through Sina Weibo in the hopes of gaining enough attention to have their book published in print. In 2010, Wen Huajian 闻华舰 started writing a fiction piece called *Love in the Time of Microblog* (围脖时期的爱情, thereafter *Love*).⁵⁷ It is a love story based on the Sina Weibo platform. The protagonist's name is Wen Dashu (闻大叔 uncle Wen), who shares the same last name as the author. At the beginning of the serialization, Wen Huajian claimed that the plotline for the story was inspired by the comments people posted about his work, which he then wove into the story. In addition to being inspired by real-time comments from readers on the site, Wen Huajian also incorporated real events that happened during the serialization. In order to attract more attention, he posted the story to other famous literature websites during the serialization. Wen succeeds in gaining enough attention to

⁵⁷ Wen Huajian 闻华舰, *Weibo shiqi de aiqing* 围脖时期的爱情 [Love in the Time of Microblog] (Shenyang: Shenyang chubanshe, 2011).

have his online work published in print. The print version is more complete compares to the Sina Weibo serialization.

In general, Wen's story is similar to *First Intimate Contact* (第一次的亲密接触),⁵⁸ which depicts a love story starting from BBS. Chinese literature scholar Hocks describes the book as “a popular romance novel dealing with the world of online dating and virtual romance, written in what had by then become a recognizable ‘online writing style’: colloquial language broken down into many short segments.”⁵⁹ Wen basically copied the entire model of *First Intimate Contact*, only he posted his version on a different social media platform.

Compare to *Love, Belonged's* publishing style has more advantages. *Love* is published on Sina Weibo according to the character limit. As a full-length fiction, publishing 140 characters per day does not create a comfortable reading experience, which also made the serialization lengthy, too. In fact, the serialization took a year, and the book was only partially posted when the serialization ended. Compared to *Love, Belonged* only took a few months for serialization,⁶⁰ and it was almost completely published online. In addition to the advantage of publishing style, *Belonged* enjoyed a much greater popularity than *Love*, as Zhang's story has received hundreds to thousands of comments while *Love* got around 20 comments under each post. *Love's* popularity is

⁵⁸ Cai, *Contact*.

⁵⁹ Hockx, “Internet Literature in China,” 31.

⁶⁰ By carefully checking Zhang's Sina Weibo, I find out that from 2012, he started writing the story. Some paragraphs published that time were in paperback, and there were a few stories published too. But the serialization started from March 2013, ended around September 2013. The paperback publishing was announced on his Weibo on October 2013.

mainly generated from being the first full-length novel that was published through Sina Weibo and its experimental publishing behavior, while *Belonged* fully utilizes the advantages of Sina Weibo and gains attention because of the story. In addition to that, *Belonged* is published through Sina Weibo, but it is not a story based on the platform; it is a book full of familiar experiences of post-80s and post-90s generations. The generalization makes the print book and movie adaptations possible as even after leaving the platform, those stories keep attracting attention and explore further financial gain. After short period of time, *Love* and its author Wen Huajian disappeared from public attention, but even now Zhang Jijia still enjoys popularity.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I first studied *Belonged*'s initial reader's demographic information, then looked at Chinese Internet literature history and development; in the last part, I researched the characteristics of *Belonged*'s publishing style as well as the publishing platform-Sina Weibo. It seems that Zhang Jijia's success is achieved by a combination of effective utilization of Sina Weibo and the decision to write and publish stories that fit to Sina Weibo users' reading habits. Sina Weibo users are mostly from post-80s and post-90s generations, and using Internet is their daily behavior. *Belonged* is published before bedtime, and the book carries healing function. Those long picture post stories are a perfectly fit for mobile device reading, when smart phones are mostly used before sleep. In addition to stories before bedtime being successful because they are crafted to work well on mobile devices, those stories are independent and can be understood without too much introduction and background. When one story is shared, followers of the re-poster

are able to read and re-share the story to other users, who most possibly have similar life experiences and will like the story. The emergence of new platforms facilitates the popularity of new writers, and Zhang has an ability of adjusting his story and publishing styles to Sina Weibo and recognizing the core feature of Internet-interacting. From an Internet and platform perspective, *Belonged*'s popularity is inevitable.

In this chapter, I demonstrated the reasons for the enormous success of the book *Belonged*. I also learned that the book's initial readers are post-80s and post-90s generations with higher education. In the next chapter, I will explore how Zhang Jiajia and readers participation adds significance to *Belonged*, the hardship that the book's readers experience, and how *Belonged* carries out the healing function.

CHAPTER 3

READERS AND *BELONGED*

3.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, I explored the possibility of *Belonged*'s popularity through Internet and the publishing platform-Sina Weibo. First, I investigated the demographic information of *Belonged*'s initial readers. Second, I introduced the history and development of Chinese Internet literature, by understanding it, the position of *Belonged* among Chinese Internet literature is clear. Third, I analyzed the characteristics of *Belonged*'s publishing platform-Sina Weibo, and how Zhang Jiajia published on Sina Weibo. Zhang Jiajia successfully adapts his stories to Sina Weibo, making the microblog platform a new place for literature publishing.

In this chapter, I will study why readers love *Belonged*. With the result that 90% of Sina Weibo users are born between 1980 to 1999, it is proven that most of *Belonged*'s initial readers are post-80s and post-90s Sina Weibo users with higher education and lower income. The research of this chapter is based on the initial readers' demographic information. This chapter will be divided into three parts: 1) how readers' participation promotes *Belonged*'s popularity; 2) social environment that post-80s and post-90s generations live in; and 3) how *Belonged* carries out healing functions.

In the first part of this chapter, I will analyze how readers' participation helps promote *Belonged*'s popularity. The development of the Internet shifts the writing process and promotes readers' participation. In this part, I will explore specific *Belonged* readers' online and offline activities and how those activities help to promote *Belonged*'s popularity.

In the second part of this chapter, I will share what I have learned about post-80s and post-90s generations experience and social environment they live in. In China, post-80s and post-90s generations are largely influenced by China's development, and the implement of the one-child policy.⁶¹ The particular social environment forges unique generations. In this part, I will study the background and social environment that post-80s and post-90s generations live in, and Chinese mainstream cultural works that depict post-80s and post-90s generations. By studying the social environment and how mainstream cultural works depict those two generations, the uniqueness of those two generations and their emotional needs will be clear.

In the third part, I will focus on how *Belonged* carries out healing function. First, I will conduct close reading to study how *Belonged* faithfully depicts post-80s and post-90s generations' experience. Second, I will analyze how Zhang Jiajia plays the role of post-80s and post-90s generations' mentor. By studying the *Belonged*'s healing function and Zhang's mentor role, I will explain why *Belonged* is a healing book for its readers.

3.2 Readers' participation and *Belonged*'s Popularity

In this section, I will discuss how readers' participation helps promote *Belonged*'s popularity. Stories in *Belonged* are first published on social media platform-Sina Weibo, and it allows readers to discuss and share those stories. Through discussing and sharing, readers form fan club, and actively participate in the book related activities. Readers'

⁶¹ Denise Sabet, "Confucian or Communist, Post-Mao or Postmodern? Exploring the Narrative Identity Resources of Shanghai's Post-80s Generation," *Symbolic Interaction* 34, no. 4 (2011): 536-51. doi:10.1525/si.2011.34.4.536.

participation made *Belonged* more meaningful for them. In this part, I will study specific reader activities and analyze how those activities promote *Belonged*'s popularity.

3.2.1 Readers' Internet Behavior

In this section, I will analyze *Belonged* readers' participation. I will study reader different activities before and after *Belonged*'s paperback publishing. By studying those activities, I will have a better understanding that how readers' participation helps spread the stories, form the fan club, and make *Belonged* become more significant.

While Zhang Jiajia was publishing *Belonged* online, readers actively participated. Because *Belonged* stories were published one by one on social media platform-Sina Weibo, readers' activities were interactive. Under Zhang Sina Weibo story posts, readers shared feelings after reading and discussed plots/characters. Some readers shared their own experiences that related to different stories, some conducted further discussion with other readers.



Figure 5. Comments under the story *The boy under river surface* 河面下的少年 (Zhang Jiajia Sina Weibo)

In addition to readers' response to different stories, those stories were shared through the Sina Weibo platform. Some readers shared the story by reposting the story posts to their Sina Weibo, others (@) users to remind them to read the story. Through those activities, not only the stories were shared, Zhang's Sina Weibo account was recommended to other users. The large number of comments under each story post and sharing different stories help *Belonged* to become widespread on Sina Weibo, and gain popularity for Zhang.



Figure 6. Readers @others in the comment under the story *Escape with you all the way with laughter* 一路陪你笑着逃亡 (Zhang Jiajia Sina Weibo)

Zhang posted a few stories before bedtime, and readers responded that they read the story before went to sleep. Posting before bedtime gradually became the convention between readers and Zhang. Zhang started referring the stories ‘stories before bedtime.’⁶² For readers, checking, commenting, and reposting became a routine before sleep. With discussion and communication between readers, and the popularity that Zhang have gained by publishing stories before bedtime, fan club gradually formed. Several closed fan groups were developed on Sina Weibo, some are based on location and others are based on common writing hobby. Some zealous fans set up fan groups on different

⁶² Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, “April 17, 2013 post,” Zhang Jiajia’s Sina Weibo, Sina Weibo, last modified April 17, 2013, https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/zsBuT6u53?type=comment#_rnd1586392120170.

platforms, such like QQ and Wechat. The unbelievable popularity of *Belonged* on Sina Weibo helped the book get a paper print publishing contract. And after the paper print was published, fans' activities extended from online to offline. Because readers love *Belonged* so much, they bought print books although they had read almost all stories on Sina Weibo, attended book-sign events, with some traveling to other cities because the cities where they stay did not hold one. One reader even bought all advertising space on Huaihai Street, Nanjing to help Zhang Jiajia promote *Belonged*.⁶³ The popularity of *Belonged* also made producers buy movie adaption rights. And with two released movies adapted from *Belonged*, readers went to theatres to watch the movies, some watched several times to support box office sales. Readers online and offline participation have further promoted *Belonged* and Zhang's popularity, and he was invited to different TV shows and gave speeches at colleges. And all those activities were attended and supported by readers too. With the money Zhang have earned from *Belonged*'s copyright, he opened his own coffee shop in Nanjing, which is visited by readers regularly.

3.2.2 Readers' participation and Results

Readers' active online and offline participation makes *Belonged* become more meaningful to them. Those stories are put together by Zhang Jiajia and readers, and they fit to readers' demand. In this process, readers' investment—time, money, emotion, and active participation—makes the book more significant to them. Through the participation

⁶³ Sun Mohan 孙墨涵, "Wanghong haishi zuojia? Bie shasha fenbuqingchu 网红还是作家? 别傻傻分不清楚 [Internet celebrity or writer? Don't mixed up]," Xinzhoukan, Xinzhoukan, last modified February 4, 2018, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1591471288476030758&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

process, readers reinterpret the story and found meanings and relation to themselves. As

Spreadable Media describes:

The circulation of media content within participatory culture can serve a range of interests, some cultural (such as promoting a particular genre or performer), some personal (such as strengthening social bonds between friends), some political (such as critiquing the construction of gender and sexuality within mass media), some economic (such as those which serve the immediate needs of everyday individuals, as well as those which serve the needs of media companies).⁶⁴

Readers actively participate in the creating process of *Belonged*, as well as create their own works that related to the stories. The book also inspires readers who have literature writing hobby to start writing their own work. These activities make *Belonged* more meaningful to readers, as the idea expressed in the stories is cultivated and reinforced together by the author and the readers. As a result, stories in *Belonged* are used as a symbol by readers. By sharing *Belonged* stories to other users on Sina Weibo and recommending stories to their friends, families, partners, or persons they want to build romantic relationships, readers use stories as a message that sent to those they care. In this way, readers try to build up connection. For those who receive the stories, their personal relationship with the sharer further adds meanings to the book. I find that this sharing behavior is very common, especially among friends and couples. Some readers even give signed books to the person they want to build a romantic relationship as a signal to confirm the relationship, others give the book as a gift to their partners to search for mutual understanding of romance. It seems clear that for those readers, *Belonged* represents a touchstone of mutual understanding between sharers and receivers. The

⁶⁴ Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, (New York; London: NYU Press, 2013), 36.

participation and various types of investment make *Belonged* stories become more intimate to the readers, represent meanings and significance that very important to readers. The significance of *Belonged* and Zhang Jiajia can still be seen from Zhang Jiajia's Sina Weibo. After seven years, readers still share their life and experience with Zhang like friends, and jokingly ask when he will write and publish his next book. It is clear that the intimate relationship is built between Zhang Jiajia, *Belonged* and the readers, and the relationship still plays an important role to readers.

During fan participation, social exchange and communication occur, and these have helped to build up relationship between readers. Although social tie is not really close between followers on Sina Weibo, communities are built up based on mutual hobbies and preferences, which strengthen the relationship between them. As I mentioned in the first chapter, on Sina Weibo, people like to follow and interact with others that share similar professions as well as ages, and in 2013, 90% of Sina Weibo users were mostly from post-80s and post-90s generations. In this way, by commenting and sharing the story, communication occurs, and some readers have made friends with each other. This social relationship is further strengthened by participating in online and offline activities such like joining *Belonged* fan club and attending Zhang's speech events. For single-child generations, this relationship is very important. The community that formed helps them have a sense of belonging.

3.3 Post-80s, Post-90s and the Society

In the previous section, I discussed how *Belonged* readers' participation promotes the book's popularity, and how the participation makes *Belonged* more significant to

them. In the second chapter, I learned that *Belonged*'s initial readers are post-80s and post-90s generations who received higher education with lower income. In the part, I will analyze the social environment post-80s and post-90s generations live in. First, I will study the policies that influence *Belonged*'s readers; second, I will dive into post-80s and post-90s generations' life situation and how mainstream cultural works overstates the importance of capital. By studying the mainstream cultural works, I argue that post-80s and post-90s people need cultural works that can faithfully represent their experience and carry out healing function.

3.3.1 One-child policy and new China

In this section, I will discuss new policies that change the social environment of post-80s and post-90s generations. I will focus specifically on the One-child policy which made most post-80s and post-90s generations become the only child in the household, and China economic development that makes China modernized and urbanized.

In China, the post-80s and post-90s generations are unique because of the Chinese society changes. Because of drastic social changes, post-80s and post-90s generations—people who born after China's reformation—live in a totally different society. Those two generations enjoy convenience, but at the same time they also face challenges.

The economy in China has been booming for the past 30 years. Under President Deng Xiaoping's Reforming and Opening Up policy, the society has experienced drastic changes. This decision makes China shift from being a communist to a capitalist society, and it have boosted both production and consumption. However, the early economy development is not purely based on wise and humane decisions. In the late 1970s, a

notorious policy called the “one-child policy” came into operation. It is this policy that made majority of people born between 1980 to 1999 become the only child in the household.

Because of the Second World War and the Chinese Civil War, President Mao Zedong encourages population growth, at that time, China needed people to resume production, and ensure soldiers are available in case of another war. Under the policy of the 1970s, the average number of children in a household at that time was six.⁶⁵ However, after the Great Cultural Revolution and subsequent starvation, the large illiterate and uneducated population was determined detrimental for economic growth. Despite this, the population was still growing fast.

For the government, the growing population was an obstacle to achieve what it referred to as ‘four modernizations (四个现代化).’⁶⁶ As a result, the one-child policy emerged.⁶⁷ As it was enforced, most citizens, especially urban population, followed the order. In rural areas, the policy allows those who first had a daughter to have another child. In recent years, because of the drastic decline of population and the burden of retirement planning the Chinese government lessened the birth control restriction. This

⁶⁵ Susan Greenhalgh, "Missile Science, Population Science: The Origins of China's One-Child Policy," *The China Quarterly*, no. 182 (2005): 9. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20192474>.

⁶⁶ Wikipedia, “Four Modernization,” Wikipedia, Wikipedia, last modified February 10, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Modernizations. Four Modernization: agriculture modernization, industry modernization, defense modernization, and science and technology modernization.

⁶⁷ Greenhalgh, *The Origins of China's One-Child Policy*, 258-268.

series of policies cause post-80s and post-90s to become two of the only three generations that born under the one-child policy.

With increased economic growth, China has modernized. The new economic machinery structure naturally benefits more urban areas. With the fast growth, the development is not even: big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen reach the global standard of modern cities and promote satellite towns' development. For landlocked, rural areas, however, the development does not bring much change. Infrastructure is barely existent in rural areas. Education, medicine, and other facilities are in primal condition, and in some areas those do not even exist.

For most families, better education for their kids seem to be the most plausible way to improve living conditions. Each year, more and more people have migrated from the countryside to cities or from small cities to bigger cities. This process is achieved either by people in the post-80s and post-90s generations or by their parents. If parents do not successfully migrate to cities, they will do their best to help their kid(s) to get better education. By receiving a college degree, some people are able to find a job in big cities and a few are able to settle down.

For most people from post-80s and post-90s generations, the experience of migrating from rural to urban area, and the pursuit of higher education become their shared memory. In the next part, I will introduce post-80s and post-90s generations' life situation and the pervasive financial stress.

3.3.2 The Life Situation and Pervasive Financial Stress

The one-child policy and China's modernization have great impact of post-80s and post-90s generations' life. In this section, I will study: 1) the life situation of post-80s and post-90s generations who migrated to urban area; 2) how mainstream cultural works stress the importance of capital; 3) how financial stress influence post-80s and post-90s generations' emotional needs.

Born between 1980 to 2013, by 2013 people from the post-80s and post-90s generations span between the ages of 14 and 33. Most have just started make-a-living by themselves. Some of them might be working in an entry position, while others were doing their best to get an internship, which would hopefully lead to a job. Stepping out of school and getting a job is a hard process. Being new graduates, their situation was far from their expectation. In addition to these challenges, life in big cities is never easy. The increasing population pressure renders the stricter migration policy, including restricted household registration, housing price and so on. The restriction of city household registration controls the benefits one can have, including public health insurance, and it further hinders the next generation from getting education and attending the college entrance exam. But for some people of these two generations, they had no choice but stay. Their college education compelled them to stay in big cities no matter how hostile the city policy was--otherwise they could not find a job around the hometown area.

In addition to job stress, pressure from their own families is devastating. For people from post-80s and post-90s generations who are the first urban generation, dealing with family can be hard. Despite increased financial stress and the importation of western culture, family bond is still very tight in China. A person will be blamed if not taking care of elders, especially for those whose families tried their best to support their education.

However, for post-80s and post-90s people who have just started their career in big cities, it was very hard for them to take care of families. In big cities, the wage seems really good, especially for those who never worked and lived in big cities before. But living expense is always ignored. Some families ask their kids to send back money every month to support the whole family that is still in countryside, especially for those whose family supported their education before. It seems like a reasonable request, but most post-80s and post-90s people who are living in big cities barely have any money left each month. Besides, when trying to talk to parents to get some comfort from them, sometimes their families will not show any understanding or compassion toward the situation. Instead, they will try to persuade their kids to come back or merely say it is their own choice so they should deal with it, or young people should be able to work hard to get a better life. For post-80s and post-90s people, while they might be willing to take care of their family, they also want to have an independent life and build up their own family; these two issues are often hard to balance.⁶⁸

In big cities, the prevailing idea of making more money further erodes post-80s and post-90s generations' happiness. Consumerism and the importance of money are prevailing in big cities, and it is very hard for these two generations to ignore the influence.

According to Sabet's study, most Shanghai post-80s people set up their own standard that fits to the modern life:

Achieving stability in their life was a high priority, basically meaning a good job with a steady salary and owning a home... In the minds of these young people, they seem to have constructed a local form of the American Dream, and economic

⁶⁸ Sabet, *Shanghai's Post-80s Generation*, 545-547.

life-course story.⁶⁹

The cognition of having a house and decent life becomes post-80s and post-90s generations' standard of becoming a real city resident and having a good life. The notion that capital equals social status made it very hard for young people to rationally consume. The current online loan and overspending problem among young people in China is a vivid example.⁷⁰ Living in big cities deteriorates the mental health of young generations.

The importance of money is further enforced by mainstream cultural works, especially those that depicted young adult's life. From *Go Lala go!* (杜拉拉升职记)⁷¹ to *Ode to joy* (欢乐颂),⁷² movies and TV dramas depict how young generations, especially females, are trying to obtain certain social status. In the TV dramas, ordinary characters are struggling as newcomers to cities and have to compare themselves to other rich, young adults and competed with unethical colleagues.

The most recent popular TV drama, *Ode to Joy*, depicts the lives of four young women. Two high social status characters, An di 安迪 and Qu Xiaoxiao 曲筱绡, are

⁶⁹ Sabet, 546.

⁷⁰ Xiaolangnv 小狼女, "21 sui meinü wudaolaoshi tiaolouzisha: bei xiaodaikuan tuokua de nianqingren 21岁美女舞蹈老师跳楼自杀: 被小额贷款快拖垮的年轻人 [21-year-old beautiful dance teacher jumped to her death: young people destroyed by microloan]," Sina Caijing Toutiao, Yijian Caijing, last modified May 6, 2019, <https://cj.sina.com.cn/articles/view/6162941440/16f57060001900j58i>.

⁷¹ *Du Lala shengzhiji* 杜拉拉升职记 [Go Lala go!], directed by Xu Jinglei 徐静蕾 (2010; Beijing: China Film Group Corporation CFGC, 2010). DVD.

⁷² *Huan le song* 欢乐颂 [Ode to joy] season 1, directed by Sheng Kong 孔笙 and Jian Chuanhe 简川訦, written by Yuan Zidan 袁子弹, aired April 18, 2016, in broadcast syndication, Daylight Entertainment, 2016, DVD.

favored by the author and are given a much better life (both professional and romantic) compare to another two characters, Fan Shengmei 樊胜美 and Qiu Yingying 邱莹莹, who struggled for everything. Ironically, the author even portrays Qiu Yingying giving up her boyfriend to let him get together with a rich girl. In these cultural works, money became the most cherished value of modern life. In the real world, most post-80s and post-90s people are ordinary people, very few born with extreme wealth like Qu Xiaoxiao, or born with extreme talent and become a big company senior executive at 31 years old like An Di.

In addition to the portrait of urban, white-collar workers, there is another controversial TV drama, *A Little Reunion* (小欢喜),⁷³ which have received mixed reviews. This drama depicts high school kids and their family's life when preparing for college admission exam. Some viewers express their concerns and frustration that the 'life' depicted in the drama is far from their own experience.⁷⁴ They describe the TV series as first-tier cities rich family's problem. They said in the review that if they grew up in such a family, they would have nothing to struggle with. While those high school kids in the show were struggling to pursue their dreams and fought with their parents about the school application, the majority of viewers during their last year of high school were worried about whether they could get into any college (the exam is much harder in non-first-tier states and cities and the college admission is very competitive) or if their

⁷³ *Xiao Huanxi* 小欢喜 [A little reunion], directed by Jun Wang 汪俊, written by Guo Sihan 郭思涵, Huang Lei 黄磊, Lei Bo 雷博, Zeng Yue 曾玥, and Zhu Jingxi 朱景曦, aired July 31, 2019, in broadcast syndication, Linmon Pictures, 2019, DVD.

⁷⁴ Douban, "A little Reunion review," Douban Movie, Douban, accessed March 26, 2020, <https://movie.douban.com/review/10410494/>.

families would be able to support the education. They view this type of struggle depicted in this TV drama as having nothing in common with their own life. Those two recent popular TV dramas represent the current mainstream cultural works that depict post-80s and post-90s life in big cities; they either fail to represent the majority or only emphasize the importance of making more money.

For post-80s and post-90s who have received higher education and have migrated to urban areas, those mainstream cultural works can cause frustration, and aggravate their stress and anxiety. First, the majorities are underrepresented. There is barely any work faithfully depict the ordinaries' life, let along portraits a positive image. Second, hardworking ordinaries is belittled while rich people have everything. It is very hard for hardworking young adults to stay positive while the majority of mainstream cultural works are advertising their effort is in vain. With the depiction of class differentiation and exacerbation of financial stress, there is no place for the ordinaries to take a break from day to day pressure. Under these circumstances, people from post-80s and post-90s generations desperately need cultural works that can represent their voice and relieve the everyday stress. For post-80s and post-90s generations who live in big cities, they want cultural works that can recognize their life experience, relieve stress, and help guide them through the difficulty. They need mentor who can share the life experience that they cannot get from their parents. As a result, *Belonged* is a great book that can fulfill all their emotional needs. In the next part, I will analyze how *Belonged* is able to depict post-80s and post-90s generations' experience, and how it plays the healing role for readers.

3.4 *Belonged's* Healing Function

In this part, I will study *Belonged*'s healing function. First, I will define healing in Chinese context. Second, I will analyze how *Belonged* depicts post-80s and post-90s life and how it carries out the healing. Third, I will study how Zhang Jiajia makes the stories more convincing by making himself as a character in *Belonged*. By studying those three points, I argue that *Belonged* is able to fulfill readers' emotional needs by successfully representing their experience and confirm their moral value. Through those stories and the established image, Zhang Jiajia is able to become a mentor for his readers and provide comfort to them.

3.4.1 Definition of Healing

In China, healing is a well-used but rarely defined concept. In mandarin, healing is usually translated to “治愈 (zhì yù)”; the literal meaning is “cure.” Works that carry clear healing function are labeled as “治愈系作品 (zhì yù xì zuò pǐn).” The popularity of the healing concept accompanies the permeation of capitalism. In China, with the permeation of capitalism and urbanization, healing becomes popular and soon is adapted into local works. The healing concept is imported from Western “Chicken soup for the soul” works and Japanese comics and animation.⁷⁵ In my paper, healing is defined as a psychological process, aims to restore the balance of mental status, and makes one to live a healthier, more positive and fulfilled life.

The pursue of healing is often an individual act with assistance from non-professional methods. This action can be either self-conscious or not self-conscious.

⁷⁵ Zhu and Wang, “*Zhiyuxi*” *zuopin*, 1.

Reading Internet genre fiction is a good example for not self-conscious healing action. Reading Internet genre fiction is as a way for young adults to release their stress. Chinese Internet literature scholar Shao explains that Internet literary works help readers cope with their painful, routine life and create a fantasy space. These most popular works project readers' desire and anxiety and fulfill desires that readers themselves are not identified. It is a way for readers to escape from the cannot-be-changed reality and thus change the unchanged through reading.⁷⁶ With regard to Internet literature readers, those individuals who are drawn to works that offer the possibility for healing may not realize or recognize the underlying reasons driving them to read particular works or why certain types of writing attract them most.

While Internet literature plays its role to help readers escape from mundane life, *Belonged* directly describes readers' life experience, and shows the pain and gain through growth. Readers are able to recognize *Belonged's* healing function and are healed by the stories. In the next section, I will analyze how *Belonged* carries out healing function by depicting readers' life experience and how the stories fulfill their emotional needs.

3.4.2 *Belonged*: A Collective Voice

Belonged is a comprehensive story collection that depicts character Zhang Jiajia and his friends' lives. The time span is roughly from 1988 to 2013. It starts from Zhang Jiajia primary school time, and the last story is a prose written for his upcoming 33rd

⁷⁶ Shao Yanjun 邵燕君, *Wangluo shidai de wenxue yindu* 网络时代的文学引渡 [Literature rendition during Internet era] (Guangxi: Guangxi shifandaxue chubanshe, 2015), 10-32.

birthday. *Belonged* contains allegories, proses, and mostly stories.⁷⁷ There are depictions of childhood in the countryside; youth and romantic love; college life and roommates; friends; and even pets. Those stories are able to depict the majority of post-80s and post-90s generations' experience.

A lot of post-80s and post-90s generations experienced migrating from rural to urban areas. In 1980, the percentage of rural population in China was 80.642%. In 2013, the percentage was 46.987%.⁷⁸ From 1980 to 2013, the total population increased, while the percentage of rural population kept dropping. This means that the urban population become much bigger both by percentage and absolute numbers. Behind the data is the massive migration from rural to urban area has slowly achieved by several generations. For post-80s and post-90s generations, the decision that brings them to urban areas takes their life to a totally different path. The difference is caused not only by physical environment and material difference, but also by accompanying culture and value shifts. For each individual, the influence is pervasive. In *Belonged*, those experiences are vividly depicted. For example, character Zhang Jiajia grew up in countryside, parents tried to put him into a better school, then he went to college in city Nanjing; after graduation, he lived and worked in different cities. The experience of character Zhang Jiajia can be divided to three parts: rural life, college experience, and working in urban areas. Correspondingly, I will conduct the detailed analysis through three parts: 1) childhood in rural area and the influence of popular cultural works at that time; 2) college life; 3)

⁷⁷ Zhang, *Belonged*, first preface.

⁷⁸ The World Bank, "Rural population (% of total population) – China," The World Bank, World Bank Group, last modified 2018, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?end=2018&locations=CN&start=198>

romance and life obstacles. In the last part, I want to discuss how *Belonged* is able to weaken the financial stress. Through the study, I will present how *Belonged* is able to represent readers and confirm their moral values.

3.4.2.1 Childhood in Rural Area

In *Belonged*, character Zhang Jiajia's childhood experience mostly relates to the brotherhood. Zhang was influenced by popular cultural works at that time. In rural areas, although there are only limited resources, some popular works at that time still reached people living in rural areas. Hong Kong movies and TV dramas, sports, and Japanese manga were widespread. In the story, *The Boy under river surface*, there is a paragraph describing character Zhang Jiajia and his friend Zhang Ping's favorite cultural works and stars at that time:

We loved *Dragon Ball*,⁷⁹ we loved Tsukasa Hojo.⁸⁰ We loved the sea appears after Cat Eye's amnesia.⁸¹ We loved Diego Maradona. We loved Danny Chan.⁸² We loved *Jinxiao duozhenzhong*.⁸³ We loved Qiao Feng.⁸⁴ We loved Yang Guo⁸⁵ became cooler each day in vagrancy. We loved Cheng Huaixiu when she was

⁷⁹ A Japanese manga series, later adapted into anime.

⁸⁰ The author of popular Japanese manga *Cat's Eye* (Kyattsu Ai) and *City Hunter* (Shitō Hantā).

⁸¹ Famous scene from anime *Cat's Eye*.

⁸² A famous singer in Hong Kong.

⁸³ A famous song performed by Danny Chan.

⁸⁴ A character from Chinese Martial art fiction *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils* (天龙八部).

⁸⁵ A character from Chinese martial art fiction *The Return of the Condor Heroes* (神雕侠侣).

away from Siye.⁸⁶ We loved *Instinct*,⁸⁷ Zheng Yijian held Chen Songling's hand, when he cried, we cried too.

我们喜欢《七龙珠》。我们喜欢北条司。我们喜欢猫眼失忆后的那一片海。我们喜欢马拉多纳。我们喜欢陈百强。我们喜欢《今宵多珍重》。我们喜欢乔峰。我们喜欢杨过在流浪中一天比一天清冷。我们喜欢远离四爷的程淮秀。我们喜欢《笑看风云》，郑伊健捧着陈松伶的手，在他哭泣的时候我们泪如雨下。⁸⁸

As a result, Character Zhang Jiajia's childhood dream is to become a soccer player or a gangster:

My dream at that time was to become a soccer player, at least became a rural gangster.

我当时的梦想是做足球运动员，不济也要成为乡村古惑仔。⁸⁹

Village gangster dream, long hovered on my youth age.

乡村古惑仔的梦想，盘旋于我的少年时代。⁹⁰

To become one of them, Zhang has to behave like them. In the story, *A God-like boy in youth* (青春里神一样的少年), Zhang Jiajia joined character Xiaoshan 小山 to form a gang in primary school. He respected the moral value of the gang, and he helped girls in his class during his middle school years.

⁸⁶ Both are characters from Hong Kong TV series *Story of Qianlong* (戏说乾隆).

⁸⁷ A famous Hong Kong TV series.

⁸⁸ Zhang, *Belonged*, 37-47.

⁸⁹ Zhang, *Belonged*, 38.

⁹⁰ Zhang, 184.

Popular cultural works such like Jin Yong 金庸 martial art novels and Hong Kong movies, dominated the cultural market at that time.⁹¹ Hero, romance, and brotherhood are common subjects of those cultural works, and the importance of being brave, kind, loving, and caring are always stressed. As Scholar Singh explains in the study, children are likely to imitate their favorite characters in the TV.⁹² Just like character Zhang Jiajia, a majority of post-80s and post-90s generations' behavior and moral values are influenced by those works. For *Belonged* readers, those stories bring back their childhood memory, and the moral values that established when they were kids.

3.4.2.2 College Life

In addition to the inclusion of childhood memories in *Belonged*, there are also many plots and stories depicting college life. College is a transitional period for most post-80s and post-90s generations, especially for those who grew up in rural areas and have come to colleges that locate in big cities. For them, college is the first time they are away from family and enjoy the independence for the first time. The relatively worry-free life makes it possible for them to do many things; what they do depends on their

⁹¹ John Christopher Hamm, "Coming Home: Jin Yong's Fiction in Mainland China," in *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel*, (Hawaii: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 227–49. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wqnh9.13; Sek Kei, "Achievement and Crisis: Hong Kong Cinema in the '80s," *Bright Lights Film Journal*, *Bright Lights Film Journal*, last modified January 1, 2001. <https://brightlightsfilm.com/achievement-crisis-hong-kong-cinema-80s/#.XpHu3i2ZORs>.

⁹² Dhyen Singh, "Television Viewing Habits and Moral Formation of Children in Rural Area," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 19, no.3 (2014): 12-16. e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/94fe/09bcc92700513abe16d7be54703180550ab0.pdf>.

individual interests. In *Belonged*, different choices and lifestyle are depicted vividly.

Some people in college are devoted to their studies:

This girl was quiet all the time, attended all classes, weekends she went to the library with a water bottle, kept reading from sunrise to sunset.

这姑娘平时不声不响，逢课必上，周末带着小水瓶去图书馆看书，日升看到日落。⁹³

There are also people enjoying freedom:

The dorm's sink was a long and broad rectangle, Zhutou 猪头 could not bear the heat, so he got into the sink and laid inside only wearing the underwear. It was nice and cool, he fell into sleep contentedly.

宿舍的洗手池是又宽又长一大条，猪头热得受不了，于是跑过去，整个人穿条裤衩横躺在洗手池里。那叫一个凉快，他心满意足地睡着了。⁹⁴

Those depiction and many other plots in *Belonged* involve common scenes of college life, such as running out of money, boys drinking together, and eating instant noodles with roommates in plastic basin in the dorm. Those depictions are closely related to post-80s and post-90s real life, as a result, for readers, they are able to relate to story characters. One reader commented under the story post, “(I) read *Belonged* for several times already! (I) feel like I can see you, me, and everyone (in those stories)! This story is writing about yourself, right?”⁹⁵ Different from mainstream cultural works, *Belonged* is able to faithfully depict the ordinary college students' life, and resonates with readers

⁹³ Zhang, *Belonged*, 70.

⁹⁴ Zhang, 10.

⁹⁵ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, “Comment from 拉面主的南柱赫,” Sina Weibo, Sina Weibo, accessed April 11, 2020, https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/zCkJMm5Z2?type=comment#_rnd1586624310390.

from post-80s and post-90s generations. In the next part, I will combine the stories in *Belonged* and discuss romance and life obstacles *Belonged*'s characters face and illustrate how the book is able to carry out the healing function.

3.4.2.3 Romance and Life Obstacles

In this part, I will analyze the life obstacles that *Belonged* characters meet after they left college. In those stories, the obstacles almost all relate to romantic relationship. In the story, *I Wish there is someone like you*,⁹⁶ Guan Chun 管春 and Maomao 毛毛 broke up because Maomao wanted Guan Chun to sell the bar he owned and buy a house to get ready for marriage, but Guan Chun did not want to sell, because it was his business although it did not make money. In the story, *The old lover letter* (老情书),⁹⁷ Hu Yan 胡言 could not move to Changsha to stay with his girlfriend Yue Yue 悦悦 because he needed to take care of his mother, in the same time, Yue Yue could not stay in Nanjing with Hu Yan, because her parents were sick and needed her. Those characters grow up with the value that encourage them to believe in brotherhood, righteous act, and other virtues, when they need to choose between partner and parents, happiness or personal career, it is very hard for those characters to make decision. Similarly, this type of question bothers the post-80s and post-90s generations, particularly because they also struggle with this question and what they should do in this situation. In *Belonged*, author Zhang Jiajia provides answer to those characters. In the story, *I Wish there is someone like you*, Maomao dated another rich guy, but they eventually broke up. Guan Chun sold

⁹⁶ Zhang, *Belonged*, 52-59.

⁹⁷ Zhang, *Belonged*, 124-132.

his bar and gave Maomao lots of money to help her get through financial difficulty. After that, Guan Chun went for a road trip. Maomao bought back the bar Guan Chun used to own and waited for Guan Chun. Eventually, they got back together. In the story, *The Old Lover Letter*, Hu Yan's mom criticized Hu Yan for giving up his Yue Yue, then travelled to Changsha by herself and promised Yue Yue that Hu Yan would come to Changsha and stay with her. Eventually Hu Yan's mom passed away, Hu Yan and Yue Yue got back together.

These stories depict the life that post-80s and post-90s are familiar with, and readers can easily resonate with the plot. For readers from these two generations, *Belonged* perfectly depicts their lives. In Zhang Jiajia's Sina Weibo, readers express their feelings after reading those stories. One reader commented, "this story made me cry, obstinate girl, just like me."⁹⁸ Under the story, *The Old Lover Letter*, readers wrote, "I want to leave a comment here, to prove at least I loved your stories. I used to be young, and wish I could be crazy like you."⁹⁹ In the Douban website book review, user *carrie* wrote, "just as he (Zhang Jiajia) said, everyone can find themselves from different stories...you and me both experienced it, it is just someone made those experiences to literature, someone buried them deep in the heart."¹⁰⁰ Those stories are able to evoke readers' emotion, and help them express their feelings that they are not able to.

⁹⁸ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, "Comment from Fault_in_stars," Sina Weibo, Sina Weibo, accessed March 27, 2020, https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/zBqPGhTEb?type=comment#_rnd1585350410020.

⁹⁹ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, "Comment from 杯子里的碎星星," Sina Weibo, Sina Weibo, accessed March 27, 2020, https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/zEVCakOIT?type=comment#_rnd1585427332819.

¹⁰⁰ Carrie, "Pashang xuanya, fenghaoxiongqiang 爬上悬崖，缝好胸腔 [Climb the

In addition to representing people in the post-80s and post-90s generations, *Belonged* carries out the healing function by encouraging readers. Author Zhang Jiajia uses *Belonged* to tell his readers there will always be a way out, and they should believe in themselves and time will help them figure out a way. Like He Muzi and Wang Hui 王慧, they found someone else; like Luo Ge 罗格, he learned from mistake and treated his new wife well; like Ma Li 马力 and Xiao Yu 小玉, they both got over, and started new life happily. In the story, *Writing for my 33rd years* (写在三十三岁), Zhang Jiajia wrote:

When I had time, I told stories before bedtime to everyone. I never tried to tell you how to solve the problem. I just want to let you know, if you are alive, you will meet these problems.

And we will all find method to solve those problems. There are different ways for different people, so no one need others' instruction. The only thing needed is time. Time is like waves in the sea, it will never stop. One day, you won't realize, the wave will push you to the broad sky, just like time will make you suddenly enlightened.

在空闲的时候，我和大家说睡前故事，从来不想告诉你解决问题的办法，只是想告诉你活着会有这些问题。

而这些问题，我们都会找到解决的办法，每个人都不同，所以不需要别人的教导。只需要时间，它像永不停歇的浪潮，在你不经意的一天，把你推上豁然开朗的海阔天空。¹⁰¹

Those stories usually do not have happy endings but express the idea that there is always a way out; everyone can find the answer in the end. In the Douban book review website, readers express their feelings about how *Belonged* is able to help them get to the right path. Douban user *Wendy* said in her book review, "In *Belonged*, each story looks like it

cliff, stitch up the chest]," Douban Book, Douban, last modified December 28, 2013, <https://book.douban.com/review/6482648/>.

¹⁰¹ Zhang, *Belonged*, 288-292.

happened behind a window, (I) walked by each window, and vaguely realized which way I should choose.”¹⁰² Those stories also give courage to readers. One Weibo User commented, “I like you. The College entrance examination is coming! I might not be able to get accepted by Nanjing University, but anywhere in Nanjing will be good. I will come to visit you. Lao Zhang (老张, nickname for Zhang Jijia), with you company, the twelfth year even becomes much easier.”¹⁰³ For post-80s and post-90s generations, *Belonged* is able to reproduce their experience, and confirm their moral value. In the same time, those stories tell his readers, there will always be solution, and encourage them to believe in themselves. In this way, *Belonged* is able to fulfill its healing function by giving its readers hope and confidence.

3.4.2.4 How *Belonged* Weakens Financial Stress

I analyzed how *Belonged* successfully depicted the experience of its readers, mostly post-80s and post-90s generations, expressed their feelings, and fulfilled the healing function. In this part, I want to analyze how *Belonged* is able to weaken the financial stress. There are rich characters in *Belonged*, but by depicting shared feelings and problems, the book is able to weaken the social stratification. In *Belonged*, three characters are depicted rich, two of the characters are Zhang Jijia’s friends in real life:

¹⁰² Wendy, “Luguo naxierende shijie 路过那些人的世界 [Pass my those people’s world],” Douban Book, Douban, last modified December 30, 2013, <https://book.douban.com/review/6485354/>.

¹⁰³ Zhang Jijia 张嘉佳, “Comment from 西瓜的保鲜期,” Sina Weibo, Sina Weibo, last accessed March 29, 2020, https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/zpgqvt2U3?type=comment#_rnd1585496517045.

Lao Zhao 老赵; He Muzi 何木子. The third character, Lao Wang 老王, is a stranger. Different from *Ode to Joy*, money cannot bring them perfect relationship and fix all problems. In the story, *Exile with you with laughter* (一路陪你笑着逃亡),¹⁰⁴ Lao Zhao's girlfriend asked Lao Zhao for money to travel to Tibet. After she came back, she left Lao Zhao to date with another guy.¹⁰⁵ In the story, *The tale of loli went ballistic* (暴走萝莉的传说), the foreign company senior executive, He Muzi, was newly married when her husband cheated on her.¹⁰⁶ In the story, *Writing for my 33rd years*, the director assistant Lao Wang got divorced.¹⁰⁷ In *Belonged*, stories never promote the idea that rich people will have a better and easier life than people without a lot of money. In *Belonged*, rich characters have ordinary friends, and the friendship is not based on money. Those rich characters have same problems as other ordinary characters, and they need help from their friends. In addition to share same problems, rich characters in *Belonged* are depicted as hardworking too. For example, He Muzi is a bold, hardworking female. *Belonged* depicts those common emotions and feelings and builds up the relationship between rich and poor, eliminates the class differentiation, and emphasizes the importance of virtue instead of money. One reader commented, "... (I) love this story so much, it makes me wait in hope again."¹⁰⁸ *Belonged* praises moral values and righteous behavior and

¹⁰⁵ Zhang, *Belonged*, 119.

¹⁰⁶ Zhang, 216-224.

¹⁰⁷ Zhang, 288-292.

¹⁰⁸ Zhang Jiajia, "Comments from 满船清梦Rainy," Sina Weibo, Sina Weibo, accessed March 28, 2020, https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/A0bvvpKKt?type=comment#_rnd1585436073846.

establishes upright characters to represent post-80s and post-90s generations, and it is accepted and welcomed by its readers.

Those stories are able to make readers focus on positive emotions and values and bring hope to them. By reading *Belonged*, readers are able to recall their own childhood and college memories, relate to characters, and draw strength from the book. Through this way, *Belonged* is able to carry out its healing function. The popularity of *Belonged* is a way to help post-80s and post-90s express themselves and show their lives and feelings to the general public, and it largely fulfills their emotional needs as to be faithfully recognized presented in the current society.

3.4.3 Zhang Jiajia: An Author and A Character

Belonged's healing function is better carried out by making readers believe those stories are author Zhang Jiajia's real-life stories. For readers, author Zhang Jiajia is a mentor. Born in 1980, Zhang is the first group of post-80s generation that have experienced the influence of social changes in China. By convincing readers that stories in *Belonged* are all his or his friends' real-life experience, he is able to make readers believe the truth of stories, and further convinces readers that they will eventually get through their life obstacles. This result is achieved from a deliberate goal by the author. In this part, first, I will analyze how Zhang Jiajia is able to make *Belonged* a real-life story; second, I will discuss how Zhang used second person narration to build up a closer relationship with his readers and fulfill his role as a mentor.

In the Chinese book market, *Belonged* is categorized as fiction/emotion/inspiration (小说情感励志), but Zhang Jiajia tried to make readers

believe that all stories are his real-life story which are artistically written. Beside his own claim, the main protagonist Zhang Jiajia (who shares the same name of the author) shares a similar life timeline and major life events. Some actual events that Zhang posted on Sina Weibo become the narrative in *Belonged*. In the story, *Those small but important existence* (那些细碎却美好的存在), character Zhang Jiajia and his friend had a bad car accident on July 1st, 2012.¹⁰⁹ There is a post with a photo of car accident in Zhang's Sina Weibo of the same date.



Figure 7. Screenshot of the car accident post (Zhang Jiajia Sina Weibo)

Zhang Jiajia also adds more details about the book as well as his own life through his Sina Weibo and different interviews, making those stories more convincing¹¹⁰.

In order to maintain and strengthen the truth of stories, Zhang Jiajia needs to keep the consistency of the portrait of character Zhang Jiajia and the author Zhang Jiajia in the

¹⁰⁹ Zhang, *Belonged*, 176-180.

¹¹⁰ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, "June 21, 2019 post," Sina Weibo, Sina Weibo, last modified June 21, 2019, https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/HzWqTvONF?filter=hot&root_comment_id=4385663350717876&type=comment#_rnd1575658918954. Zhang Jiajia explained the relationship between his own life and the book, and some real-life people and characters in the book.

real life. To achieve this, Zhang edited his Sina Weibo posts just like he edited the book. In the early time, like others, Zhang Jiajia's Sina Weibo was mostly self-related content. In addition to the self-related content, he likes to share his opinions about the society and join Sina Weibo platform hot topics.



Figure 8. Screenshot of Zhnag Jiajia Sina Weibo before *Belonged* publishing (Wayback Machine-Internet Archive)

Before publishing *Belonged*, Zhang Jiajia had nearly 100,000 followers on Sina Weibo. He was working for a local TV station as a TV show guest, so he enjoyed some publicity. His public marriage proposal on TV broadcast in 2011¹¹¹ attracted some attention, but as the show was locally broadcasted, he did not attract attention nationwide. Despite the impressive proposal effort, Zhang Jiajia's marriage does not last long. He divorced in 2012, and then he went traveling and started writing *Belonged*. In *Belonged*, there is no statement of Character Zhang Jiajia's divorce, but there are several stories depict character Zhang Jiajia's struggle and suffering around the time of author Zhang's divorce. For the author, writing *Belonged* is a way for him to retrace his feeling and

¹¹¹ Zongyi xinshijie 综艺新世界, "Huanxiyuanjia jingcaipianduan: ganrenqiu hun relixiang dangchagnbiaolei 欢喜冤家精彩片段：感人求婚惹李响当场飙泪 [Quarrelsome Lovers highlight: moving proposal made Li Xiang cry in front of everyone], accessed March 18, 2020, https://www.iqiyi.com/v_19rs8unu20.html.

experience. After several years of *Belonged* publishing, Zhang is able to explain the reason that cause the divorce, and his daily posts become less sentimental too.

Zhang's early posts usually receives fewer than 50 comments. After his story is broadly circulated on Sina Weibo, the number of comments rises to around 1,000; those with hashtag (#)storybeforebedtime even attracts more than 20,000 comments. Those stories attract unexpected attention and make him a famous Internet celebrity.



Figure 9. Screenshot of Zhang Jiajia Sina Weibo after *Belonged* publishing (Wayback Machine-Internet Archive)

After got popular on Sina Weibo, Zhang Jiajia started deleting his early posts. At the beginning, he only deleted posts that exposed too much private information, especially those related to his ex-wife. But after the initial attempt, he did not stop. He started scrutinizing his old posts and deleted posts that did not fit to the personal image he established through *Belonged*.

By applying different strategies, Zhang Jiajia successfully makes his image on Sina Weibo consistent with the character Zhang Jiajia in *Belonged*. First and most importantly, the style of his Sina Weibo posts is similar to the portrait of character Zhang Jiajia, marking his action of protecting his ex-wife's identity. By keeping the secret, he protects his ex-wife and further builds up his image as a soulful gentleman. Although

before the last revision was published not long ago, he explained the reason of divorce is ex-wife cheated on him. However, he stressed that the actual reason is complicated and mostly due to his own ignorance and carelessness, and this point is expressed throughout the entire book. More importantly, he does not pretend everything is fine or belittle his ex-wife; he mourns his loss and expresses his sadness and regret both in Sina Weibo and his book. Second, the short marriage does not destroy his humor and hope. His belief that one day everything will be fine encourages his readers to face their own life obstacles, and this attitude is expressed both by *Belonged* and his carefully edited Sina Weibo. For readers, reading *Belonged* is like to witness author Zhang's reflection of life and his self-healing process. As author Zhang Jiajia is able to get through such a hard time, it is a big encouragement for the readers to believe the message that expressed in the book. Zhang's talent as a writer, combining his life experience and positive attitude make his popularity possible. He builds up a strong bond to his readers and provides endless emotional support. Through this, Zhang Jiajia becomes his readers' life mentor.

After analyzed how Zhang Jiajia keeps consistency of his image both in real life and in *Belonged* as a character, I will study how Zhang is able to use second person narration to build up close a relationship with his readers, and better fulfilled the mentor role. While writing *Belonged*, author Zhang Jiajia was fully aware of his readers. Zhang Jiajia uses second person narrative in the book title, as well as in the stories. As I mentioned in the first chapter, the title of *Belonged* was voted on by readers on the Sina Weibo platform. All alternative titles are second person narrative. These five options are listed in the poll:

I Belonged to You 从你的全世界路过

I Wish There is Someone Like You 我希望有个如你一般的人

You are Arrived, Don't Cry 到站了，别哭
I Will Try My Best to be Nice to You 我要丧心病狂对你好
[I will buy the book no matter what title is] 【叫什么名字我都买】¹¹²

In addition to the book title, in almost all stories there is a poetic paragraph that the author wrote to express his main point or lesson for that story. For example, in the story, *I wish there is someone like you* (我希望有个如你一般的人):

Someone hid it in the heart, someone spoke it out. Maybe someone used to look at you quietly: could you wait for me, until I awaken, until I know black and white, until I convince myself, until I climb back from the cliff, until I stitch my chest together and come to see you.

有些人藏在心里，有些人脱口而出。也许有人曾静静看着你：可不可以等等我，等我幡然醒悟，等我明辨是非，等我说服自己，等我爬上悬崖，等我缝好胸腔来看你。¹¹³

Readers can find similar poetic paragraphs at end of nearly every story. It is the core thought that Zhang wants to express through each story, and the second person narration makes it feel like that Zhang is speaking directly to readers. As a result, readers are willing to believe the experience shared in *Belonged*. On Sina Weibo, one user commented, “this story made me feel much clear-headed after brokeup, love it.”¹¹⁴ By using second person narrative, Zhang Jiajia is able to further fulfill his position as life

¹¹² Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, “book title poll,” Sina Weibo Poll, Sina Weibo, August 8, 2013, https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/A3YsjmlmH?type=comment#_rnd1585507723608.

¹¹³ Zhang, *Belonged*, 59.

¹¹⁴ Zhang Jiajia 张嘉佳, “Comment from 爱上呆呆猪的刀刀,” Sina Weibo, Sina Weibo, accessed March 28, 2020, https://www.weibo.com/1197362373/zzLF69QuU?type=comment#_rnd1585512367546.

mentor, talking to his readers directly about what he wants them to learn from his own experience.

Belonged faithfully depicts post-80s and post-90s generations' life and at the same time provides comfort to them. In the story, the depiction of childhood rural life, college experience, and the struggle in big cities recalls memories of readers who have similar experiences. *Belonged* does not create a false equal world but focuses on shared feelings and life obstacles. Additionally, *Belonged* respects the value young generations being taught. Love, respect and compassion are expressed throughout the story. It sends a message to readers: there will always be a way out, so trust yourself. By writing about his own experiences, Zhang can share the courage and hope through those desperate moments and thereby offers comfort to his readers, gives them courage to get through their own hard times.¹¹⁵

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I first studied how readers' participation adds significance to *Belonged* and promotes the book's popularity, the society and post-80s and post-90s generations, and how *Belonged* carries out its healing function. By researching these three points, it seems clear that *Belonged* is able to depict its readers' experience, express their feelings, and fulfill their emotional needs by providing comfort to them.

¹¹⁵ Li Mengdi 李梦迪, "Zhang Jiajia 1benshu gaibiancheng 5budianying cheng 80hou yizhangwo huayuquan 张嘉佳1本书改编成5部电影 称80后已掌握话语权 [Zhang Jiajia's one book were adapted to five movies, he claimed that post-80s generation are holding the right of speech]," Sohu Culture, Souhu, last modified January 1, 2014, <http://cul.sohu.com/20140108/n393134410.shtml>.

In the first part of this chapter, I studied specific readers' activity and how their participation makes *Belonged* more significant to them and helps to promote the book's popularity. Because *Belonged* is first published online, it allows readers to participate in the publishing process. Readers are able to comment, discussing, and communicate with each other. Through the communicating process, fan clubs are established. *Belonged* stories are shared through Sina Weibo, and it brings unbelievable popularity to both *Belonged* and author Zhang Jiajia. Because of the popularity, *Belonged* is published in paper print and is adapted to two movies. After *Belonged*'s publication, readers' participation extends offline too. Readers' participation also makes *Belonged* more significant to them. By sharing the stories, they use *Belonged* as a message to communicate with their friends, family members, and partners. Through sharing, sharers give *Belonged* meanings, and the book has more meaning toward sharers. And through sharing, *Belonged* is widely circulated, and eventually have gained its popularity.

In the second part, I studied one-child policy and social changes that influence post-80s and post-90s generations. The one-child policy makes most post-80s and post-90s generations become the only child in the household. And the reform and open up policy makes China modernized. In order to get a better living, the rural to urban migration have started. For post-80s and post-90s generations, the Chinese society has become a new society, and there is no experience can be learned from their parents. They have problem settle down in urban areas while is still facing the pressure of taking care of their family. In addition to the stress, the mainstream cultural works further worsen the financial stress of these two generations. Overemphasizing the importance of money cannot help them relieve the everyday stress. As a result, post-80s and post-90s

generations need cultural works that can faithfully represent their life and bring comfort to them.

In the third part, I defined the concept of healing, studied how *Belonged* depicts ordinary people's life and carries out healing function, and how Zhang Jiajia builds up a closer relationship with readers and become a mentor. *Belonged* not only depicts its readers' life experiences, recognizes their feelings, and emphasizes the moral values they grow up with. In addition to faithfully depicts the experience, *Belonged* is able to weaken the financial stress by stressing shared feelings and life obstacles of rich people and ordinary people. *Belonged* is able to alleviate readers' stress and anxiety by affirming them there is a way out. In the same time, author Zhang Jiajia uses different strategies to convince readers that *Belonged* is a real-life story and uses second person narration to give advice to his readers directly. As a result, readers are willing to believe those stories as real-life stories and are able to draw courage from the book.

Belonged successfully carries out healing function by depicting its readers' experience, resonating their feelings, and giving comfort to them. By reading *Belonged*, readers' emotional needs are fulfilled. Readers' life is properly represented, their feelings are expressed through those stories, and the book brings comfort to them.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, *Belonged*'s popularity is studied from the Internet and social perspectives. As an Internet literature work, *Belonged* opens up a new way for literature publishing and explores a new type of work that is much welcomed by the contemporary literature market. The book depicts post-80s and post-90s generations' life, stresses love, care and compassion between friends, families and couples. Studying the phenomenon helps me to understand Internet literature in China, readers' participation and how the participation adds the significance of *Belonged* and promotes the book's popularity. In the last part, by studying the life situation of post-80s and post-90s generations and how *Belonged* is able to fulfill their emotional needs and carry out healing function, I have better understanding of why *Belonged* is able to get popular and the post-80s and post-90s generations' life in contemporary society.

Belonged's popularity can only be achieved in Internet era. In China, Internet literature is very popular. The emergence of a new platform always brings out a batch of new writers. Zhang Jiajia successfully adapts his stories to the microblog platform- Sina Weibo and opens up a new possibility for Internet literature publishing. In order to cater to Sina Weibo users, the stories are all short stories and are published in full each time in long-picture post form. This form fits best to mobile device reading, especially smart phones. Additionally, after a few posts, Zhang starts posting stories between 10 p.m.-12 p.m., and pinpoints the story series as stories before bedtime. He uses hashtag (#)storybeforebedtime and sets his stories with a healing function. His publishing behavior almost fulfills all requirements for Sina Weibo users' preferences.

During the publishing process, Zhang is able to attract attention on Sina Weibo, and gains a lot of followers online. Readers' participation helps Zhang to settle the style of the story, and their sharing behavior not only helps the book to gain its popularity but adds meaning to the book. By recommending the book to their friends and partners, the book carries a message and the expectation of mutual understanding among sharers and receivers. As a result, *Belonged* obtains more meaning for sharers and receivers.

As *Belonged*'s initial readers on Sina Weibo are mostly post-80s and post-90s generations, and the author belongs to post-80s generations, *Belonged* can be seen as a book for these two generations. Post-80s and post-90s born under China's huge transformation, most people from post-80s and post-90s generations are the only child in the household. The complicated social environment largely influences these two generations. With the modernization process, lots of people from post-80s and post-90s generations have received better education and have experienced rural-urban migration. Most of them grew up in rural area and are trying to find jobs to settle down. However, the stress both from the society and families makes it really hard for them. In addition to the stress, mainstream cultural works do not fairly represent those two generations. It either stresses the class differentiation or overemphasizes the importance of money. Under this circumstance, *Belonged* faithfully depicts the majority of post-80s and post-90s generations' life and calls attention to the importance of love and care. This has helped people from these two generations express themselves and cope with the life obstacles they face. And by making readers believe that those stories are real-life stories and utilizing second person narration, Zhang Jiajia is able to build up a closer relationship

with his readers and become a life mentor to them. This further helps *Belonged* to fulfill the healing role.

From social perspective, *Belonged* and other Internet literature works carry important social function and cannot be judged only by literature aesthetic value. Those literary works are able to fulfill the emotional needs and carry out the healing function that mainstream cultural works cannot. As a result, scholars should pay more attention to Internet literature as an important part of popular culture and Internet, and it should be studied more carefully.

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