

# ***Analysis of Narrative Characteristics of the Novel "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" Using the Ideological Criticism Method***

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**Abstract:** Ideological criticism in literature refers to the analysis and study of literary works from specific class or party perspectives, aiming to illustrate the ideological nature inherent in all literary creations. Ideological criticism in literature has existed since ancient Greek times and evolved into a systematic critical theory and doctrine in the nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, with the rise of Marxist literary criticism in the Western world, ideological criticism entered a new phase, giving rise to numerous critics and theorists, becoming a significant phenomenon in twentieth-century literary and cultural criticism. Since adopting Western models and concepts of literary criticism in the twentieth century, ideological criticism has been one of the most influential critical schools in domestic literary criticism practices in China. The extensive novel by the author Mo Yan, "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out," can be thoroughly analyzed through the ideological criticism method, focusing on its content from the perspectives of characters, language, and plot.

**Keywords:** Ideological criticism, social change, class struggle

## **1. Introduction**

"Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" is a lengthy novel published by Mo Yan in 2006. Within a mere forty-three days, Mo Yan penned over four hundred thousand words, encompassing the historical changes in Chinese society from 1950 to the latter half of the new millennium and the joys, sorrows, separations, and reunions of various people during this transitional era. Unlike his previous works, Mo Yan employs a daring and unique narrative technique in this novel by adopting the Buddhist concept of the six paths of reincarnation, choosing to narrate worldly stories from the perspectives of various animals after their reincarnation. The novel depicts the protagonist, wealthy landlord Sima Na, from Ximen Tun in Gaomi County, Northeast China, who was unjustly labeled as a counter-revolutionary during the land reform and subsequently executed by militiamen representing the new regime. Due to deep grievances after death, Sima Na repeatedly pleads his case to the King of Hell, leading to his reincarnation successively as a donkey, ox, pig, dog, and monkey before finally becoming the oversized baby Lan Qiansui. Only then does Sima Na, after enduring over fifty years of arduous and torturous reincarnations, completely dispel his anger and resentment, allowing him to return to the human realm. Throughout these fifty-plus years, Sima Na, in various animal forms,

witnessed firsthand the era's transitions in post-establishment of New China: from the Great Leap Forward, People's Communes, Great Leap Forward in Steel, agricultural collectivization, "Four Cleanups" movement, "Anti-Rightist" movement, Cultural Revolution, reforms and opening up, to the advent of the market economy, and subsequently, the celebration of the new century. Not only Sima Na but also all his relatives and friends in the human world deeply experienced the absurd and merciless nature of history.

According to the Althusserian-Macheret school structuralist ideological criticism method, the structure of a literary work takes on a "centrifugal" form. This literary processing of ideology peers into the functionality of ideology itself through the "centrifugal" structure or form of the work. [1] Literary production serves to give shape and structure to ideologies lacking form and appearance. The organic entirety of literary form fails to reveal the limitations and contradictions of ideology; hence, it tends toward ideological conformity. In the view of Marxist theorist Louis Althusser, the true form of an artistic work is perpetually "centrifugal," "irregular," and "incomplete." There exist no central elements in a work; instead, there are continual conflicts, discrepancies, and dissipation of meanings. This arises because when an author attempts to articulate truth in their own way, they inadvertently expose the limitations of the ideology under which they write. They must reveal gaps and silences, indicating something they cannot express clearly. These gaps and silences within a work render it perpetually incomplete. The function of literary criticism is to make the silences within a work "speak." It's precisely due to the centrifugal, dissipated, and incomplete structure of literary works that the blank spaces and silences within a work are as significant as its materialized parts. The relationship between a work and ideology isn't just about what it articulates but also about what it doesn't. The presence of ideology is most palpable within the profound silences of a work, within its gaps and blanks. Building upon this, Althusser posed the question of the role of scientific reading, which includes literary criticism. Reading (including its advanced form of criticism) is about making the silences within a work "speak," about "theorizing" what is being read. Therefore, readers, including critics, must introduce theoretical understandings that the text and its author lack into the text. Similar to his mentor Althusser, Michel Maffesoli firmly believed that the meaning of a work isn't self-contained but encompasses many unspeakable gaps and discrepancies, hence the essence of criticism lies in elucidating the conflicts and voids within a work. [2] Through an analysis of Mo Yan's preceding works, one can consistently discern his creative intent to break free from the constraints of official ideology, unleashing the imaginative power of folk culture and robust primal vitality, a pattern that remains unbroken in "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out." However, even amidst the vibrant and lively landscape of folk culture, we can inadvertently glimpse evident traces of ideology in this work. I believe this can primarily be analyzed from three aspects: characters, language, and plot.

## **2. Destruction and Distortion, Idealism and Delusion: Ideological Analysis of Characters**

Firstly, let's consider the protagonist, Ximen Nao. The novel begins by detailing the genesis of the story: a hardworking and generous landowner from Gaomi County in Northeast China, Ximen Nao, unfortunately, becomes a sacrifice in the tide of land reform. On the bitterly cold 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, he was gunned down by local militiamen, Huang Tong, on a small stone bridge in his hometown. [3] In a brief moment, Ximen Nao transforms from a prominent, respected figure in the human realm to a pitiable, innocent spirit wandering in the underworld. While Ximen Nao endures excruciating torture in the netherworld, the earthly realm, post-successful widespread land reforms, joyously welcomes the establishment of New China, portraying the stark contrast between the joy of the living and the dismal plight of Ximen Nao's ghost. This vivid contrast between the "yin" and "yang" implicitly signifies the inevitable demise of the old landlord class and the irreversible trend of the nascent democratic regime, reflecting a class-based ideological appeal. Not only Ximen Nao's ghost

in the underworld but also the various animal "transformations" he undergoes after reincarnation symbolically convey ideological messages, evident within the novel's context. Ximen Nao's first three reincarnations as a donkey, ox, and pig occur within his hometown, Ximen Tun. As he transforms into a dog and monkey, his activities shift to the county town. This seemingly casual narrative design holds profound social ideological metaphors, reflecting the transition of Chinese society from rural to urban focus, planned economy to market economy, and collective production to individual entrepreneurship through the perspectives of animals. [4] Next is the terminus of Ximen Nao's six paths of reincarnation, the oversized baby Lan Qiansui. This character's role in the novel is not merely as one of the narrative subjects but is also ideologically nuanced through the description of his physical traits. The novel describes Lan Qiansui's appearance: "This child was born unusually. He had a small body but an extremely large head, with exceptional memory and linguistic ability (这孩子生来就不同寻常。他身体瘦小，脑袋奇大，有极强的记忆力和天才的语言能力。)" Moreover, in the thirty-third chapter, the novel playfully describes Lan Qiansui's "disproportionately large and ugly reproductive organ (与他年龄显然不相称的粗大而丑陋的生殖器)," seemingly incongruent with his age. This peculiar infant might be seen as an oddity. However, considering the backdrop of Lan Qiansui's birth era, one might glean the true intent behind Mo Yan's portrayal of this infant. Lan Qiansui arrives in the world as the millennium begins, hence his name. As China steps into the new millennium, economic prosperity abounds, living standards rise, and the country aligns itself with globalization after joining the World Trade Organization. This prosperity manifests in Lan Qiansui as his enormously intelligent head symbolizes a bright future. His large reproductive organ signifies robust vitality, projecting the enthusiasm and ambitious aspirations of the people buoyed by favorable circumstances. [5] Nevertheless, like anything else, economic development has a double-edged nature. It brings high-quality living but also inner emptiness and ethical decay. Under the surge of the market economy, material desires skyrocket, and money clouds people's minds, leading some to forsake spiritual cultivation for the pursuit of worldly success. This results in moral decline and ethical compromises, with material abundance masking severely flawed souls. This is symbolically represented by Lan Qiansui's prodigious head connected to a shriveled body. In essence, Lan Qiansui epitomizes a collective representation of Chinese society entering the new millennium—an unconscious portrayal of that era's populace.

Next is another significant character in the novel—Lan Lian. The author invests substantial narrative power in shaping this character. He's an utterly ordinary farmer from Ximen Tun, like others, toiling the land day after day. However, he is also remarkably different. While many joined the People's Communes to embrace agricultural collectivization, he openly opposed the People's Commune system, persistently opting for individual farming. Eventually, he "gloriously" became the only steadfast individual farmer in all of China. Lan Lian's steadfast insistence on self-cultivation and self-sufficiency bewildered those around him. Many readers initially found this confusing. Yet, I believe this stems from ideological impetus. According to the novel, Lan Lian's refusal to join the Commune system stems from the traditional notion of "when brothers divide, the family falls apart; mixing with unrelated people, stirring the same pot—how could that be good?" This centuries-old belief originates from his pure attachment and sense of belonging to the land. He believes that farmers must rely on the land to survive. Hence, he desires only to quietly cultivate his small plot of land. Placing his land within collective ownership would defile its sacred position in his heart. That piece of land should belong to him alone; he guards it as one would a beloved partner. This represents an extremely simplistic view of the small-scale agricultural economy. In feudal times, farmers worked their respective lands with this simple mentality. Though arduous, it brought a sense of contentment and happiness. However, when this naive view collided with the backdrop of agricultural collectivization in the 1950s and 1960s, it gained a more profound and intriguing significance. It hinted at the merciless suppression and trampling of the collective on the individual. Under the

overwhelming collective trend, individual voices faced the threat of complete extinction. In this scenario, what was originally a legitimate progressive action of collectivization led to primitive, barbaric tendencies. The land lost its revered and respectable status, degenerating into a cold tool serving collective interests. This was a result the author least wanted to see, leading to the creation of Lan Lian—a faithful advocate of the simplistic, self-sufficient natural view of peasant economy, calling for a return to more rational folk-natural living. From another perspective, we can view Lan Lian as a devout follower of Taoist philosophy. His defiance during an era of intense collectivization aligns with the Taoist concept of "governing by non-interference (无为而治)" and the ideas of "disengagement (出世)" and "avoiding the world (避世)." While everyone ardently dedicated themselves to socialist endeavors, he remained calm, akin to a secluded sage, observing everything happening in the world. Even when news of the passing of the nation's highest leader reached Ximen Tun, and everyone wept, he sat at his doorstep, attentively sharpening his sickle, completely unmoved. This god-like perspective elevated Lan Lian to a higher spiritual realm than any other character in the novel. Unlike others entangled in the vortex of worldly pursuits, Lan Lian spent his entire life silently cultivating his land, unaffected by external factors. Eventually, he peacefully passed away, dying in the tomb he dug for himself. The tomb contained the uneaten food from Lan Lian's household, and a gravestone read "Everything from the land shall return to the land (一切来自土地的都将回归土地)," seemingly carrying philosophical connotations of the unity of nature and man (天人合一). From this angle, when we read about the profound relationship between Ximen Niu and Lan Lian, which could be considered the deepest emotional bond in the book, working together day and night on their land, one can't help but recall the image of Laozi, the founder of Taoism, riding a green ox, departing from Hangu Pass in search of the ultimate sacred place for self-cultivation. Lan Lian seems, in a way, to have received inspiration from Laozi in the cosmic order, seeking the ultimate mystery of governing by non-action upon the land.

Another tragic figure in the novel is Hong Taiyue, the former village chief, cooperative society president, and Party branch secretary of Ximen Tun. He could be regarded as a tragic character. Prior to liberation, disguised as a beggar, he, as an underground Party member, rendered numerous services to the Communist Party. After the founding of the People's Republic, he was officially promoted to the highest leadership position in Ximen Tun. During his tenure, amidst the nationwide enthusiasm for the "Great Leap Forward (大跃进)" and the "people's commune movement (人民公社化)," Hong Taiyue fully mobilized the villagers of Ximen Tun. He fervently encouraged everyone to join the cooperative society and embrace the socialist path. Following Lan Jiefang's admission to the commune, all the villagers, except Lan Lian, responded to Hong Taiyue's call. He garnered significant respect among the villagers, representing the undisputed mainstream ideology in Ximen Tun during that period. However, after the extravagance of the "Great Leap Forward" and the communal raising of pigs during the Cultural Revolution (文革), Hong Taiyue gradually lost power. Eventually, Ximen Jinlong replaced him, leading to a drastic change in his demeanor. He became erratic, spending his days in madness and drowning his sorrows in alcohol. His later insane behavior vividly reflected the prolonged period of social transformation experienced by Chinese society in the late 1970s and 1980s—an era characterized by confusion, anxiety, and restlessness. Having fallen from the pedestal of mainstream ideology, Hong Taiyue witnessed the shattering of his diligently cultivated political utopian ideals. The "ironclad red land" underwent an overnight transformation (铁打的红色江山一夜之间就变了天), a reality he never even dreamt of. His worldview suffered such a colossal blow that he found it hard to digest. He was momentarily unable to comprehend it and could only, through his own madness, barely counter the madness of the world he gazed upon in the distance. What Hong Taiyue mourned and regretted was not the demise of this "red land (红色江山)" but his own relegation from power by others. During his tenure, Lan Lian, who had always stood in opposition to him,

harbored a "land utopia" ideal. However, unlike Hong Taiyue's "political utopia (政治乌托邦)," Lan Lian's utopia was fully realized only after he merged with the land, performing a symphony of earthly harmony. Conversely, Hong Taiyue, laboring in political circles his entire life, drifted further from his ideals. The reason lay in his inability to grip power eternally. In other words, the realization of the "land utopia" relied on genuine love and reverence for the land, while the "political utopia" could only be sustained through secular power. Love may endure, but no one's authority can be eternal. This became a paradox of Hong Taiyue's "political utopia." Unfortunately, he never comprehended this reality. He persistently attempted to perpetuate the illusion of this "utopia in the mirror." Eventually, he paid a heavy price for his obstinacy. After stepping down from his official position, Hong Taiyue, in the silkworm breeding room, tried to use his remaining influence to coerce Bai, the original wife of Ximen Nao, into submission. However, this scene was witnessed by Zhuang Shiliu, the third reincarnation of Ximen Nao, stirring memories of his past. Years of suppressed retaliatory emotions surged forth like a burst dam, and feeling his dignity violated, Zhuang Shiliu bit off Hong Taiyue's genitals, rendering him a eunuch. Subsequently, Hong Taiyue, strapped with explosives, perished alongside Ximen Jinlong. Both were sacrifices of authority, having once savored the delights brought by power, only to meet an ignoble end. Hong Taiyue, self-proclaimed as the "guardian" of the red land, a political fanatic, met his demise alongside the resounding lyrics of "L'Internationale" he sang, and the grandiose "political utopia" ideals, all vanishing into the recesses of bygone memories.

### 3. Obscurity, Loss, Sealing, and Taboo: An Ideological Analysis of Language

Regarding language, Eagleton expressed: 'Literature is not a form of documentation directed toward ideology. Literature itself possesses a particular linguistic structural form; literary production holds its own distinctiveness and agency, not always operating within the same mode as general ideology.' He further proposed a deviation of literary language structures from everyday discourse. General ideology exists through discourse, preceding an author's creation. When an author employs this discourse in their creation, it becomes an entry into it. The author's personal discourse evidently undergoes societal discourse processing. Concurrently, the author also processes societal discourse, resulting in a significantly complex appearance of literary production. It's due to this processing by authors that ideological elements in literary works become aesthetic ideologies. Hence, by reading certain linguistic descriptions within novels, one can unearth the direction of ideology. Let's examine a passage from Chapter Twenty-Four:

'Through his mouth, I became the most cultured and erudite pig on Earth in the 1970s. I knew that U.S. President Nixon, accompanied by a large entourage, landed at Beijing Airport aboard the '76 Spirit,' painted in silver, blue, and white. I also knew that Chairman Mao Zedong, amidst his study filled with bound books, received Nixon. Besides the interpreter, Premier Zhou Enlai and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger were present. I knew that Mao humorously told Nixon: 'During your last election, I voted for you!' Nixon humorously responded: 'You chose the lesser of two evils!' I also knew that American astronauts boarded the 'Apollo 17' spacecraft and landed on the moon. They conducted scientific investigations, collected numerous rock samples, planted the American flag, and then relieved themselves extensively, as the moon's gravity is weak, causing their urine to splash like yellow cherries...'

(就是从他嘴里, 我, 成了七十年代地球上最有文化、最博学的一头猪。我知道美国总统尼克松带着大批随员, 乘坐着涂抹成银、蓝、白三色的“七六年精神号”座机降落在北京机场。我还知道毛泽东主席在他摆满了线装书的书房里接见了尼克松, 在座的除了翻译之外, 还有国务院总理周恩来和国务卿亨利·基辛格。我知道毛泽东幽默地对尼克松说: 上次你们选举时, 我投了你一票! 尼克松也幽默地说: 您这是两害相权取其轻! 我还知道美国宇航员乘坐“阿波罗 17 号”飞船登上了月球, 宇航员在月球进行了科学考察, 采集了大量岩石标本, 插上美国

国旗，然后撒了一泡很大的尿，因为月球的引力很小，那些尿液，像黄色的樱桃一样飞溅起来.....)

This humorous and witty depiction is employed by the author when describing Pig Sixteen's infatuation with learning a lot from reading 'Reference News' by Mo Yan in the newspaper. I believe every reader, after going through this passage, can't help but chuckle. However, humor often serves as the most powerful means for authors to employ satire. This passage is no exception; beneath its humorous appearance lies a deep-rooted level of satire. During the era of Pig Sixteen's third reincarnation, mainland China was undergoing a tremendous Cultural Revolution. This ruthless red storm cast a 'reckoning (清算)' upon every Chinese mind, where quotations, slogans, and slogans occupied their entire spiritual existence. Everything had to yield to political propaganda, and every action was dictated by political correctness. Under this extreme pressure of ideological control, the human soul suffered an exhausting squeeze, reduced to a thoughtless, lifeless shell. Traditional culture was deemed heretical, ethical and moral values were relegated to mere decorations; it was, indeed, a time of societal collapse and cultural ruin. Later, whenever authors described this period, it was always with immense sorrow and indignation. Hence, through this light-hearted and humorous text, Mo Yan attempts to dilute his internal wounds caused by history. However, in reality, the more relaxed and entertaining the text, the more it corroborates the author's resolute intent to conceal the accusations against history and his noble sentiments of compassion. Similarly, the portrayal of 'an erudite pig' contrasts with the ignorant masses of that era, disclosing the brutal fact of 'humans being inferior to pigs (一头博文多学的猪).' Furthermore, a sentence before this quoted text is also noteworthy:

'At that time, 'Reference News' was the only newspaper that could speak some truth. All other newspapers and broadcasts were filled with falsehoods.'

(那个时代，《Reference News》是唯一还能说点真话的报纸，其余的报纸、广播，全是假话空话。)

It was precisely this 'Reference News,' a lonely outpost defending the truth that remained during those years, which gained the unreserved favor of Mo Yan, a seemingly insignificant author in the novel. So much so that he voluntarily requested to perform nighttime duty at the brigade headquarters, solely to have the opportunity to read 'Reference News' daily. It undoubtedly reflects Mo Yan's intention, through the character in the novel with the same name, to reveal his fearless courage to break through ignorance and taboos and stride firmly toward the path of truth-seeking.

Let's now examine this passage of language description:

'I swiftly moved, agilely grabbing the edge of the straw hat... just like a well-trained discus athlete hurling a discus, I flung the hat containing apricots out. The golden straw hat drew a beautiful arc towards the distant moon, and the melody of a touching straw hat song resounded in the air: Lalala—lalalala—Mother's hat flew away—Mother's hat flew to the moon—lalalala...'

(我一抽身，眼明爪快地抓住了草帽的边缘.....如同一个训练有素的铁饼运动员将手中的铁饼抛出那样将爪中的盛着杏子的草帽撇出去。金色的草帽画着美丽的弧线飞向已经远去的月亮，一首动人的草帽之歌的旋律在空中轰然响起：啦啦啦——啦呀啦啦呀啦——妈妈的草帽飞啦——妈妈的草帽飞向了月亮——啦呀啦啦呀啦.....)

This content is described in Chapter Twenty-Nine of the novel, where Pig Sixteen and Diao Xiaosan fight fiercely over mating rights. The 'Straw Hat Song (草帽之歌)' echoes frequently, interspersed throughout several paragraphs, becoming the theme of this chapter. Initially, readers might find this passage perplexing. What is it about? Why mention a song, especially one about such a common item as a straw hat, with lyrics that repeat just two or three lines? Is the author merely trying to meet a word count quota? However, in my view, the author is not rambling nonsensically but has a hidden agenda. A brief analysis of a few key terms in the 'Straw Hat Song' reveals the

essence. Words like 'straw hat,' 'moon,' 'mother,' followed closely by 'love' and 'ideals,' are quite elegant and pure in their essence. These terms, combined, could easily create a poetic and picturesque scene. However, the author chooses to use them as accompaniments to a brawl between two pigs, turning what could be a serene background into a discordant mix. This stark contrast, contrary to harmony, brings readers a unique visual shock, constantly reminding them that this was not an era to indulge in romance or ideals but was the Cultural Revolution, a time dominated by class struggle. Indeed, it was an exceptionally brutal and intense period of struggle. How many individuals, once full of hope for the future, had their prospects abruptly shattered by this decade of turmoil? They harbored lofty ideals and sweet love, once able to gaze at poetry and distant horizons under the moonlit sky. But when the Cultural Revolution arrived, everything ended. Politically driven tasks became the grave for ideals and love. The cries for 'eliminating the four olds' blocked the path to poetry and horizons. Scores of intellectuals and young students were persecuted to death, and no one dared to speak out for them as they were branded 'counter-revolutionary' and nailed to the pillar of shame. Hence, I have reason to believe that the author, by repeatedly mentioning the 'Straw Hat Song' in this chapter, aims to allegorically represent the loss of values and ideals among a generation of intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution. Unjustly killed, they did not see a bright future, remaining suspended in the dark void. How could their souls rest? The 'Straw Hat Song' becomes a sacred hymn, ferrying the spirits of the departed, attached to golden apricots, aboard the straw hat boat, under the protection of Mother Earth, toward the moon to seek true love and ideals, completely distancing themselves from the struggles of pigs and humans in this world. Isn't this the best destination for them? This concise 'Straw Hat Song' undoubtedly conveys the author's goodwill and blessing. At the same time, it's essential to focus on the symbolism of 'straw hat' and 'moon' in this context. I believe the 'straw hat' symbol in the text holds a unique, significant meaning. This simple, pure, and unadulterated object seemingly reflects the author's yearning and longing for a return to a state of simplicity amidst the chaos of the world. After all, one doesn't need much life experience to understand that a straw hat is often associated with terms bearing a strong natural, wild essence such as farmlands, forests, and rivers. Zhuangzi, while watching fish in the Hao River, wore a straw hat. Jiang Taigong, fishing by the riverside, wore a straw hat. Tao Yuanming, who abandoned officialdom for reclusion, wore a straw hat while working in the fields. Even Lan Lian, an ordinary farmer in Ximen Tun with Taoist leanings, also wore a straw hat while tending to the fields. Using a straw hat as a boat to ferry the unjustly deceased souls to the mythical land of true ideals seems utterly fitting. As for the symbol of the 'moon,' it has actually appeared several times in the novel. In the preceding Chapter Twenty-Eight, the author separately describes Mo Yan and Lan Lian toasting to the moon at night. For centuries, countless literati and poets have tirelessly praised its purity and grace. Those who can recognize the beauty of the moon are true idealists; it holds a sacred place in their hearts. In other words, the moon is essentially the totem shared by idealists worldwide. Can't we say that Lan Lian and Mo Yan in the novel are also idealists? The land and writing were their lifelong dreams. Hence, it's their inevitable fate to ferry those departed souls to the moon using a straw hat boat. This is a metaphysical identity and value identification; only on the moon can those former idealists—romantic intellectuals—truly be themselves. Moreover, I believe there's a sentence in Chapter Twenty-Eight that serves as the highlight of the entire chapter: 'This situation deeply moves me; in an age where the masses sing praises to the sun, there are still people who establish such a profound connection with the moon (这情形让我感动万分, 在万众歌颂太阳的年代里, 竟然有人与月亮建立了如此深厚的感情).' This brief sentence actually contains a strong ideological implication. Through comparison, on one side, there's an era of absurdity where the fervent masses excessively worship authority, and on the other, there's Lan Lian, who remains steadfast, seeing the moon as a true confidant. Through this expression, the author successfully stamps an ideological imprint on the sun and the moon—two natural objects. Consequently, the sun symbolizes the dominance and tyranny



under the patriarchal system, while the moon symbolizes kindness and compassion under the matriarchal system. This is also corroborated in the following chapter's 'Straw Hat Song,' where the lyrics mentioning 'mother' (or representing Mother Earth) and the moon, symbolizing the maternal system, form a juxtaposition, jointly maintaining the operation of the maternal world and foretelling that those departed souls, scorched by the patriarchal sun, can only find complete healing by returning to the embrace of the maternal moon. Now, let's revisit the title of this chapter: 'Straw Hat Song Accompanies Loyalty Dance.' Isn't the author's intention evident here? The straw hat soaring into the sky looks down upon the grotesque and ludicrous political sycophancy below in a noble, almost messianic posture. At that moment, one might not know whether to mock or pity it. Those mother pigs dancing in a circle, biting each other's tails, are the unfortunate souls who lost their way in the brutal class struggle of that era. The departed souls on the moon have found their true spiritual sanctuary for their spiritual transcendence. But when will this 'herd' of ground-based pigs, obsessed with displaying their dance, wake up?

Next, this passage describes:

Your son emerged from the kitchen, clenching the middle finger of his left hand with his right. Blood seeped from between his fingers.

"Lan, have you gone mad?" Pang Fenghuang exclaimed.

"It's indeed the seed of my second uncle!" Si Men Huan said. "Daring to act for real at a critical moment."

"You illegitimate child, stop talking nonsense!" Pang Fenghuang shouted. "Quick, bring out your mother's divine hair."

Si Men Huan dashed into the house, retrieved seven thick and lengthy strands of hair, placed them on the table, and burned them to ashes.

"Lan, release his hand!" Pang Fenghuang reached for your son's injured wrist.

Your son's middle finger was undoubtedly severely injured. I saw Pang Fenghuang's face turn pale, mouth agape, brows furrowed, as if she was also in considerable pain.

Si Men Huan used a fresh banknote to scoop the ashes from the table, evenly sprinkling them onto your son's injured finger.

...

Pang Fenghuang slowly released her grip.

"How is it?" Si Men Huan asked smugly.

"It's truly miraculous!" Pang Fenghuang said."

(你儿子用右手攥着左手的中指走出厨房。血从他的指缝里渗出来。

“老蓝，你疯了！？”庞凤凰道。

“果然是我二叔的种子！”西门欢说，“关键时刻敢动真格的。”

“你这个私生子，别耍嘴皮子了！”庞凤凰喊叫着，“快把你妈妈的神发拿出来吧。”

西门欢跑进屋去，拿出七根又长又粗的头发，放在桌子上烧化成灰。

“老蓝你松开手！”庞凤凰伸手攥住你儿子那只受伤的腕子。

你儿子中指受伤一定很重。我看到庞凤凰脸色雪白，张着嘴，皱着眉，好像她也很痛的样子。

西门欢用一张崭新的钞票把桌子上的发灰铲起来，均匀地洒在你儿子的伤指上。

.....

庞凤凰缓缓地松开了手。

“怎么样？”西门欢得意地问。

“果然神了！”庞凤凰说。)

This segment of dialogue at the end of Chapter Fifty-One in the novel recounts Lan Kaifang's act of verifying Huang Huzhu's divine hair by cutting his own finger, and fortunately, the hair did stop



the bleeding. This dialogue seems inconspicuous in the entire novel and might not attract much attention, yet upon closer examination, it might be an underlying narrative clue. This thread is reliant on a peculiar setup in the text: the mystical nature of Huang Huzhu's hair. As early as Chapter Seventeen, the novel reveals the miraculous nature of Huang Huzhu's hair: 'There are capillaries in the hair. If cut, it bleeds. Her hair is thick and plump, a rare sight (头发上有毛细血管, 一剪就往外渗血丝儿, 她的头发根根粗壮, 抓上去肉乎乎的, 这样的头发, 世所罕见)'. In the narrative, Huang Huzhu never trims her exceedingly thick and long hair because it bleeds when cut and seemingly possesses a hemostatic function akin to a plaster. Hair bleeding? Such an incredible occurrence seems only heard of in mythological tales. However, we must note a small detail often overlooked by most readers: Huang Huzhu is the only major female character in the entire story besides Si Men Bai's wife who has not borne children. Si Men Huan is her child, adopted later with Si Men Jinlong. Regarding Bai's wife, the author does not significantly emphasize her in the text, making her not a central character. Thus, among the key characters in the novel, only Huang Huzhu, a female character, has not borne children. Even Pang Chunmiao, a married woman who engages in extramarital affairs, died suddenly after becoming pregnant. This seemingly inconsequential clue is, in fact, the key to unraveling a series of mysteries about Huang Huzhu and the subsequent plot. Following this clue, we deduce two characteristics about Huang Huzhu: the divine nature of her hair and her inability to conceive. Yet, these two traits seem paradoxical when considered together because the reason her hair is referred to as divine is due to its connection to blood vessels, its thickness, and its continuous growth—typically symbols of robust vitality. However, why did her bodily energy suddenly decline regarding the matter of reproducing offspring? To answer this question, we need to analyze Huang Huzhu's personality traits. Upon reading the text, it becomes evident that within Huang Huzhu, both good and evil coexist. For instance, in Chapter Seventeen, Lan Jiefang encounters Huang Huzhu on his way to find Si Men Baofeng and asks her, 'Have you seen my sister? (互助, 看到我姐姐了吗?)' Unexpectedly, Huang Huzhu responds first with a cold and contemptuous expression and then twists her mouth, speaking in a tone of extreme disdain: 'Her? She's fooling around with Ma Liangcai at the elementary school, go take a look. The two dogs, one male, one female, both are equally promiscuous. They might be mating by now! (她呀, 在小学校里, 与马良才麻缠呢, 快去看看, 两条狗, 一公一母, 一个更比一个浪, 这会儿, 差不多配上了!)' Due to seeing her crush, Ma Liangcai, and Lan Jiefang's sister, Baofeng, getting close, Huang Huzhu, full of jealousy, harbors animosity toward Baofeng. This incident shows Huang Huzhu's envious, malicious, and narrow-minded nature." This excerpt goes into depth about character dynamics and narrative clues within the story, exploring the complexities of Huang Huzhu's character and the potential significance of certain events in the plot.

But by the 30th chapter, Diao Xiaosan was bleeding profusely due to the cruel castration inflicted upon him by humans, putting his life at risk. Huang Huzhu hastily summoned Bao Feng to bandage Diao Xiaosan's wound. The novel portrays Huang Huzhu in this situation, 'sweating profusely, with tears streaming down her face, as if Diao Xiaosan wasn't a detestable boar but rather a relative connected to her by blood (竟是满头的汗水, 满眼的泪水, 好像刁小三不是一头面相可憎的公猪, 而是一个与她血肉相连的亲人)'. Upon seeing that Bao Feng's medical kit lacked the necessary suturing supplies, she volunteered to use her own hair as stitching thread. Despite Bao Feng's suggestion that using her excellent hair on a pig would be a waste, Huang Huzhu generously replied, 'My dear sister, don't say that. My hair is as worthless as cow tails or horse manes. If not for its defect, I would have cut it off long ago. My hair cannot be cut, but it can be pulled out (妹妹, 瞧你说的, 我的头发, 跟牛尾马鬃一样, 一文钱不值, 如果不是有那毛病, 我早就一顿剪刀咔嚓了。我的头发, 不能剪, 但可以拔)'. At that moment, Huang Huzhu, like a compassionate mother, showed boundless care and affection for the injured pig. This contradictory and complex figure, intertwined

with prosperity and decline, kindness and malice, combined with her long, agile, and elegant hair, suggests that the author has uniquely characterized her, embodying two symbolic systems from mythology—Nüwa and Medusa. Nüwa is a primordial goddess in ancient Chinese mythology known for creating humans and all living things. Thus, Nüwa symbolizes life, reproduction, and family prosperity, being the primary object of reverence in early matriarchal societies for reproduction worship. Medusa, on the other hand, is a snake-haired female monster in ancient Greek mythology. Anyone who looked into her eyes would turn to stone, symbolizing boundless fear, repression, jealousy, hatred, and isolation. Both Nüwa and Medusa have snake-related elements: Nüwa has a human head and a serpent's body, while Medusa's hair consists of venomous snakes. When these two powerful mythological figures, one from the East and one from the West with infinite powers, coexist within a single body, it's bound to trigger an imbalance of energy. Therefore, we witness Huang Huzhu, protected by Nüwa, originally intended for prosperity in descendants, but Medusa's intervention sealed her reproductive ability, forcing Nüwa's divine power to shift to her hair, resulting in her 'divine hair,' which is a symbolic representation of her indirectly potent reproductive capability. As for Huang Huzhu's nature of good and evil, it is connected respectively with the kindness of Mother Earth represented by Nüwa and the cruelty of the Medusa monster. Now, let's return to the quoted passage: what happened after Lan Kaifang cut his finger to try the hair? He engaged in an incestuous relationship with Pang Fenghuang, resulting in her pregnancy with Lan Kaifang's child, and later Pang Fenghuang died from severe bleeding during childbirth. The child, Lan Qiansui, was born with hemophilia, causing continuous bleeding. Although the bleeding from Lan Kaifang's finger stopped, Pang Fenghuang and Lan Qiansui's bleeding could never be stopped. In other words, Lan Kaifang's ability to stop the bleeding in his finger came at the cost of continuous bleeding for Pang Fenghuang and Lan Qiansui. So why did this happen? Considering the analysis made earlier regarding Huang Huzhu's character, a bold conjecture can be drawn: perhaps this is an unspeakable curse, a curse from Medusa, the demon within Huang Huzhu. Constantly antagonizing the divine power of Nüwa within her, after sealing Huang Huzhu's reproductive capability, she placed a curse so that anyone related to Huang Huzhu by blood would suffer misfortune if they used her divine hair, violating the taboo. Unfortunately, Lan Kaifang, her sister's son, defied this prohibition, and as a result, calamity struck, leading to his incestuous relationship with Pang Fenghuang, giving birth to a deformed child, Lan Qiansui, and ultimately causing the destruction of both Lan Kaifang and Pang Fenghuang. Perhaps this is why the author stated that this wasn't deliberate on his part but was rather an outcome of the characters' individual fates. Perhaps this is why the author mentioned that this was not intentional on his part but rather the characters' individual destinies at work. So, was this seemingly powerful and inexplicable seal on Huang Huzhu finally lifted? In fact, as we approach the end of the novel, the author provides us with an answer. The answer lies in the last section of the fifth part, where Huang Huzhu says to Lan Jiefang, "Starting today, let's live as humans... (从今天开始, 我们做人吧.....)" Huang Huzhu was unfortunate; she never truly had her own child in her lifetime. However, at the same time, she was fortunate because Lan Jiefang's sincere love ultimately helped her successfully remove the seal within her. Initially, when she first lived with Lan Jiefang, she was unable to face Lan Jiefang tenderly due to the suppression of her human nature by the seal, only able to 'kneel on the bed like a dog.' Later, when the seal was broken, Medusa's lingering spirit was expelled, leaving only the energy of Nüwa within Huang Huzhu. It was only then that Huang Huzhu, as she wished, faced Lan Jiefang with her true human nature, experiencing a harmonious and joyous fusion of life with him. Ximen Jinlong was merely her nominal husband and never truly loved her. Throughout her life, the only one who truly loved her was Lan Jiefang.

#### **4. Exaggeration and Devotion, Challenge and Subversion: Ideological Analysis of the Plot**

Eagleton argues that the object of literary texts is not life (history) but rather ideas (ideology). He

claims that the view suggesting a direct and spontaneous connection between text and history is erroneous because it is a naive empiricism that should be thoroughly abandoned. The "real" history, commonly referred to as the essence of life, never directly presents itself before the text. What presents itself before the text is neither the real history nor entirely chaotic phenomena; instead, it is history constructed by specific ideologies, "meaningfully" manipulated by ideology. Ideology continuously constructs history and imparts meaning to it. What the text can access is this "meaning," this specific self-experience, not the so-called "real," "true," or "pure" history. Therefore, although history indeed enters the text, it does so as ideology. Similarly, the historical plot described in "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" is not pure history but permeated with extensive ideology. Here, I will analyze a few representative examples.

Firstly, in the novel's sixth chapter, the narrative recounts the first reincarnation of Ximen Donkey during the night when Ximen Donkey was having a rendezvous with the donkey he admired. Suddenly, two wolves intruded into their view, prompting them to collaborate and cunningly kill the wolves, removing the obstacles in fostering their affection for each other. Both donkeys, risking their lives, boldly fought the considerably stronger wolves, unbelievably managing to kill the troublesome pair of wolves overnight. Ximen Donkey, overnight, gained fame and became a well-known heroic donkey, with legends spreading everywhere about its slaying of the wicked wolves. Readers might initially marvel at the miraculous story and regard Ximen Donkey as a divine donkey. However, when we detach from this story and consciously relate it to the historical context in which it occurred, we might immediately discern the undertone the author intends to convey. Indeed, this period coincided with the era of the Great Leap Forward and "launching satellites," when an atmosphere of false exaggeration prevailed. Absurd claims such as "a sow surpassing an elephant" or "producing tens of thousands of kilograms of grain per day" were rampant, and people, under the powerful political hypnosis, began to consider these statements unquestionable truths. Thus, when revisiting this story, its close association with the Great Leap Forward becomes apparent. Under normal circumstances, a donkey would never prevail against wolves. Yet, in that particular historical context, the authorities assured us that nothing was impossible, thereby endowing Ximen Donkey with boundless power and legitimacy to overcome the wolves, securing absolute trust from the masses for this story. Mo Yan, who has always been wary of avoiding official historiography, unexpectedly aligns himself with the mainstream political ideology in this chapter, singing a hymn to the Great Leap Forward. Whether this was intentional on the part of the author or an inadvertent act remains a question that perhaps only Mo Yan himself can answer.

Second is Chapter Twenty of the novel, the final chapter of Ximen Bull's story. In this chapter, Ximen Bull concludes his ordinary yet splendid life, but the way his life ends is truly heart-wrenching. Originally accompanying Blueface in insisting on an independent path, Ximen Bull is forcibly pulled into the People's Commune. During the spring plowing season, Ximen Bull is assigned the task of pulling a plow for the commune's land. However, Ximen Bull simply lies motionless on the ground, infuriating Ximen Jinlong. Having just experienced political setbacks, Ximen Jinlong decides to vent his grievances on Ximen Bull. He first "tears off the large whip on his shoulder, swings it, and fiercely lashes the bull's back," delivering twenty lashes. Then, kicking with both feet, he targets the bull's head, face, mouth, and abdomen. Next, he forcibly connects the nose ring worn by Ximen Bull to his biological mother, a Mongolian cow, forcing the mother to tear off Ximen Bull's nose. Even in this state, Ximen Jinlong refuses to stop. He immediately brings maize straw, sets it alight behind the bull, attempting to burn it alive. Ximen Bull endures a series of tortures akin to hellish torment in a short period, his body is brutally wounded, flesh and blood blurred. Yet, it doesn't yield. Gasping for breath, it insists on standing up, stumbling to Blueface's narrow one-acre-six-field. Only then does it finally let out its last breath. Even in death, it chooses to die on its best friend's land, vowing not to work for public land as long as it labors on its own. What fearlessness in the face of danger, what righteousness!

Contrastingly, Ximen Jinlong's brutal actions towards the bull are beyond reproach, a despicable act of a political puppet whose mind is completely clouded by political interests, a bloodthirsty demon devoid of human conscience. The depiction of this segment in the novel is not a mere fabrication by the author; it indeed represents a microcosm of the Cultural Revolution era. It mirrors the inhumane persecution, under the guise of political righteousness, carried out by the "progressive" individuals against all those labeled as "capitalist roaders" or "counter-revolutionaries." These crimes against humanity, shielded by political justification, left the innocent victims without recourse, while the behaviors of the "model heroes" were glorified and praised everywhere. The cruelty of class struggle is evident in this context. The author uses the tragic death of Ximen Bull to express his tearful accusation against that dark era of reversing right and wrong, blurring distinctions. It could be said that Ximen Bull died in place of Blueface, influenced by Blueface's choices. Their constant companionship made it firmly believe in Blueface's decisions as correct. Hence, it resolutely stood by Blueface's side, never betraying him in its lifetime, a loyalty and virtue that an animal like a bull should possess. After Ximen Bull's fall, the novel continues, stating, "Its behavior has awakened many who were disoriented during the 'Cultural Revolution'." At this moment, we seem to experience a kind of grand Christ-like sacrifice purifying our souls. Ximen Bull here is unmistakably the embodiment of Jesus in Christianity, willingly sacrificing its life to ensure Blueface's continued perseverance, hoping to awaken the temporarily misguided and pitiable souls. It's no longer a draft animal toiling in the fields but a wordless martyr detached from the worldly, calmly facing all the vicissitudes of the world. Faced with the crowd's maniacal whipping, it never resists but silently endures. At this point, the bull is no longer just a bull; it transcends to divinity, ascending to religious heights, opening its soul to sublimation, gazing compassionately at the violent abuses on the ground. This is not mere talk; the passage in the text proves it:

'Never have we seen such a stubborn bull,' those who beat it inwardly exclaim. Their expressions are somewhat unnatural, tinged with shame. If they were beating a fiercely resisting bull, they would be at ease. But because they are beating a submissive bull, it causes them to doubt. Many ancient moral principles and myths churn in their hearts. Is this still just a bull? Perhaps it is a god, or maybe a Buddha. Enduring such suffering, is it meant to enlighten those lost in the maze? People, do not commit violence against others or against bulls. Do not force others to do what they don't want, including bulls.'

(从来没见过这样倔强的牛，那些打你的人，发自内心地感叹着。他们脸上的表情都有些不自然，都有些羞愧之意。如果他们打的是一头猛烈反抗的牛，他们会心安理得，但他们打的是一头逆来顺受的牛，这就使他们心中生出疑惑，许多古老的道德准则，许多神鬼的传说，在他们心里翻动起来。这还是头牛吗？这也许是一个神，也许是一个佛，它这样忍受痛苦，是不是要点化身陷迷途的人，让他们觉悟？人们，不要对他人施暴，对牛也不要；不要强迫别人干他不愿意做的事情，对牛也不要。)

Upon finishing this passage, I subconsciously had an illusion; it seemed as if it wasn't the people whipping the bull but the bull lashing the group of people. It used endurance as its lash, launching an invisible scourge that was more potent, piercing the depths of human souls, making them realize their sinful deeds. Hence, we witness the effectiveness of this scourge; they started feeling compassion and no longer wished to aid evil. While humanity subjected Ximen Bull to physical punishment, Ximen Bull also executed a judgment on humanity's souls. Ximen Bull's death signifies resurrection on another level; through its immense compassion, it conquered humanity and attained spiritual eternal life. It's not merely "dying for righteousness" but also "dying to become divine."

Moreover, Chapter Thirty-Two of the novel holds substantial value for analysis. The story depicted in this chapter is vivid, interesting, and carries the colors of heroic legends. Pig Sixteen kills the cunning and treacherous old Xu Bao, who caused misery to many male animals, but fears reprisal.

He decisively incites the pig group to rebel against humans. Unfortunately, apart from a sow named Xiaohua, the other companions are dull and ignorant, reluctant to leave the comfortable human-made shelters. Thus, Pig Sixteen is compelled to take Xiaohua and head north, swimming in the grain-transporting river. The primary driving force for Pig Sixteen's tireless swimming in the river is the moon. The moon moves swiftly in the distance, seemingly provoking Pig Sixteen's competitiveness, luring it into pursuit. Subsequently, when Pig Sixteen lands, it engages in a frantic attack against the wild boars, seeking revenge for the deceased Xiaohua, unexpectedly encountering its good friend Diao Xiaosan, miraculously becoming the pig king on the sandbar. This segment of the plot is, without a doubt, Mo Yan's vivid and unbridled imagination, soaring to the aesthetic realm of Chinese classical mythology. The crucial point lies in the action word "chasing the moon." Upon seeing these two words, we subconsciously associate them with ancient Chinese myths like Kuafu chasing the sun and Chang'e flying to the moon. They all share a commonality: striving to break free from the shackles of natural laws, fully exerting their subjective initiative to achieve their original goals, and ultimately realizing their own value. Kuafu sacrificed his life for the benefit of future generations, Chang'e became a deity on the moon, and Pig Sixteen gloriously ascended to the supreme throne of the sandbar pig king. From this perspective, isn't Pig Sixteen's feat a fairy tale version of "Kuafu chasing the sun"? However, if we limit our analysis of this chapter to this level, it would be hasty and superficial. The timeline involved in this chapter is equally noteworthy. It's essential to note that Pig Sixteen's quest for the moon and kingship occurred immediately after a significant event on the Chinese land—the passing of the top leader. Consequently, this story inevitably embeds political ideological discourse within the cloak of classical mythology. One sentence in this chapter serves as a keyhole into understanding this:

"...he is dead, and the human world will undergo tremendous changes."

(.....已死，人的世界必将发生巨大变革。)

After the highest authority departed this world, a considerable period of power vacuum emerged within the country. This situation had its advantages and disadvantages. The downside was the absence of a central figure, making it challenging to form unified policy opinions, leading to political turmoil, social chaos, and scattered public sentiment. However, simultaneously, such an environment, on the other hand, was conducive to breaking the decades-long blind faith in authority from the "Great Leap Forward" to the Cultural Revolution and the serious constraints imposed by the "Two Whatevers" policy on national thinking. This facilitated the liberation of social consciousness and cultural thoughts. Therefore, Pig Sixteen's actions, killing Xu Bao, breaking away from human control, and later becoming king after chasing the moon, actually foreshadowed the loosening of the former high-pressure societal situation after the decline of authority and the end of the Cultural Revolution. People were no longer adhering strictly to rigid dogmatic theories and began introspectively contemplating their inner selves. This led to a widespread discussion in society regarding the standards of truth, reigniting the long-dormant national vitality. Pig Sixteen's transformation from a domestic farm animal raised by humans to a free ruler on the sandbar signifies "self-exile," encouraging people to challenge authority, dismantle orthodoxy, and break superstition. It urges individuals to seek paths to realize their true value with independent rational qualities. However, this isn't the entirety of the story's significance. After Pig Sixteen became king on the sandbar, upon returning to Ximentun, it witnessed the humiliation of its former wife, Madame Bai, which led to Pig Sixteen biting Hong Taiyue, the instigator. This act caused humans to perceive it as a brutal beast. Pig Sixteen roamed and committed atrocities in various areas of Gaomi Dongbei Township, causing harm to many people. This escalated the conflict between humans and wild boars, turning Pig Sixteen from the "heroic boar" of yesteryears into the present "public enemy." This initiated a massive human-boar war. Reading about Pig Sixteen commanding its "children" to battle humans, my mind conjures a scene from "Journey to the West," where Sun Wukong angers the Jade

Emperor by causing chaos in the Three Realms. The Jade Emperor sends a hundred thousand celestial soldiers and generals to suppress the "monkey demons" on Flower Fruit Mountain. Here, humans, disturbed by Pig Sixteen and its boar followers' continuous intrusions, decide to enter their stronghold, Wujia Shazui, to eradicate this group of wild boars. However, the confrontation between Flower Fruit Mountain and the Celestial Realm in "Journey to the West" is ingeniously transformed into the conflict between the wild boars on the sandbar and humans.

The opening sentence of Chapter Thirty-Three of the novel describes a subtle connection between the two:

"At first, I attempted to implement a monogamous system on the sandbar, thinking that this reform in human civilization would be greeted with applause. However, to my surprise, it met with strong opposition."

(起初,我试图在沙洲上推行一夫一妻制,我原想这体现了人类文明的改革会引起一片欢呼,但没想到却遭到了强烈的反对。)

Pig Sixteen tries to implement a "one-man, one-wife system" on the sandbar but faces strong opposition, indicates its aim to establish an independent kingdom that mirrors human societal organization but is free from human influence. Doesn't this parallel Sun Wukong's initial obsession with creating the "Flower Fruit Mountain world"? This intertextual interaction bears an intrinsic meaning. It symbolizes a challenge to another authority. In "Journey to the West," after Sun Wukong became the Monkey King of Flower Fruit Mountain, he enjoyed carefree days with his monkey subjects. But upon witnessing a monkey's death, he lamented the impermanence of life and set out to seek immortality. Later, he learned the Seventy-Two Transformations from Patriarch Bodhi and, through various actions, achieved ultimate ideals like living as long as the heavens and becoming as radiant as the sun and the moon. Reflecting on Pig Sixteen, its reign on the sandbar might also imply an attempt to escape the spread of underworld power into the human world, subverting the law of "humans going to hell after death," to break free from the cycle of samsara, and control life and death completely. Similar to Flower Fruit Mountain and the narrative strategy of "ruling the mountain as king" seen in various ancient and modern tales, after Blue Face's "Land Utopia" and Hong Taiyue's "Political Utopia," Pig Sixteen also sought to construct a "Sandbar Utopia" for itself and the wild boars. Hence, the narrative of Pig Sixteen chasing the moon and becoming king, beneath the aesthetic veil of Chinese classical mythology, harbors challenges to two levels of authority: political authority in the mortal world and the death authority in the underworld. Unfortunately, Pig Sixteen wasn't as fortunate as Sun Wukong. "Life and Death are Wearing Me Out" is not like "Journey to the West." Its envisioned "Sandbar Utopia" was ultimately reduced to ashes by a ruthless fire, and its challenge to the authority of the underworld also ended in failure, plunging it once again into the destined cycle.

## 5. Conclusion

An analysis of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" in terms of characters, language, and plot reveals a substantial presence of ideological references within the text. Whether this is intentional or not on the part of the authors, it seems to illustrate that despite efforts to avoid ideological influence on content, literary works cannot completely detach themselves from ideology. Thus, the notion of breaking free from the established confines constructed by ideology becomes a false premise. Consequently, it can be affirmed that ideological criticism, as one of the most important modes of criticism, will continue to exert significant influence in the domestic literary criticism arena, being employed by the majority of critics to analyze a range of literary works.

Reflecting on the novel "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out," it becomes apparent that:

Firstly, the characters in the work, such as Ximen Nao, Lan Lian, and Hong Taiyue, not only serve as narrative subjects but also carry profound and intricate ideological discourses within them. These

ideological discourses consistently accompany the characters' actions, becoming latent identifiers within the narrative.

Secondly, the language used in the novel continues the folk-traditional, raw speech style typical of Mo Yan. However, beneath these stylistic expressions, we can decipher the ideological codes concealed by the author, imparting a dual meaning to these expressions—simultaneously portraying folk cultural life and subtly conveying ideological directions.

Thirdly, akin to works like "Red Sorghum Clan" and "Sandalwood Penalty," Mo Yan persistently embellishes the story plot in "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" with heroically mythical renditions, aiming to vividly depict and showcase the exuberant primitive vitality and rhythms prevalent in the earth of Gaomi Northeast Township.

Yet, beneath these mythical and legendary surface narratives, the author ingeniously integrates a latent narrative bearing ideological hues. These dual-layered narratives progress in parallel without contradiction, enriching the story plot's depth and dimensions, offering multiple interpretative perspectives. This duality is also a significant factor contributing to the massive success of "Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out" after its publication.

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