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On the Study of Zadie Smith in China and Abroad: Reflection and Forecast

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Abstract

Zadie Smith, a preeminent contemporary British novelist, has garnered international acclaim for her works that interrogate identity politics, multiculturalism, trauma, ethics, and cosmopolitanism within postmodern London. This paper synthesizes Smith's literary trajectory—from her debut *White Teeth* (2000) to later works like *Swing Time* (2016)—her transformative life experiences shaping her thematic preoccupations, and the current scholarship on her fiction. A comprehensive review of foreign and domestic studies reveals diverse research foci: foreign scholarship explores spatial writing, multicultural hybridity, trauma, and narrative innovations (e.g., "hysterical realism" and metamodernism), while domestic research evolves from initial thematic introductions to in-depth analyses of diaspora, space, and ethics. However, existing studies suffer from three key limitations: overreliance on postcolonial frameworks for identity analysis, insufficient attention to Smith's narrative styles in the British realist tradition (especially in Chinese scholarship), and inadequate exploration of postmodernity's impacts on her realism. To address these gaps, the paper proposes three research directions: contextualizing Smith's realist concerns and identity themes within the interplay of realism and postmodernism, integrating her narrative experimentation with social critiques, and adopting ethical criticism to offer Chinese perspectives on her ethical inquiries. This study aims to reposition Smith's works beyond narrow postcolonial readings, highlighting her unique contribution to contemporary British realism through the dialectic of deconstruction and humanistic engagement.

Keywords: ethical concerns, identity negotiation, narrative experimentation, Postmodern Realism, Zadie Smith.

1. Introduction

Zadie Smith, originally Sadie Smith, was born in London in 1975 to a white British father and a Jamaican mother, who changed the spelling of her first name to Zadie at age 14. She spent her youth in northwest London, in the neighbourhood that also often figures in her novels and the fictional birthplace for the main characters. Smith liked to create poems and short stories in childhood. While still a student at King's College, Cambridge, Smith sold the manuscript of her début novel *White Teeth* (2000) for a reported price of £250,000, which gained not only much media attention but also critical assessments, during which the most representative and authoritative one comes from James Wood who assesses it as "hysterical realism". In effect, no matter positive appraisement or critical comments, both evidence that Smith, in her undergraduate school, became one bright star in the Milk Way of literature, which is a good start for her writing career. Following this, she gained the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study fellowship to read MA at Harvard University, which sets the academic background for the campus novel *On Beauty*. Smith was married to Irish poet Nick Laird and shuffles between London and New York City, where she is currently a tenured professor of Creative Writing at New York University.

By summarizing Smith's experience, it is clear that her traces of life spread from the neighbourhood corner to the international metropolitan center, from lower class to middle class, and from common school to elite university, which presents her transformation from nobody to somebody. In other words, all choices of renaming, further education, trans-country residences, and works evidence her belief in crossing-over and overturning that play essential roles in the development of human life. The transformative life accurately proves her consistent exploration of self and society and sets stable grounds for her aggressive and pushful personality in the fictional world. As a result, this forms the basis of her keen observation of differences and her engagement in the transformation of characters in novels. Her characters, especially the black female born in the lower class, have equally innovative spirits facing difficulties in modern society obsessively revolving around racist discrimination, gender inequality, class determination, etc. Smith is brave enough to put words on paper and still courageous enough to have them turn on herself and her readers. To a large degree, both significantly affect her deconstructive and (re)constructive thoughts in her writing.

She is a prolific contemporary writer, an outstanding novelist, and an insightful literary critic. After her critically acclaimed début *White Teeth* (2000), four more novels followed: *The Autograph Man* (2002), *On Beauty* (2005), *NW* (2012), and *Swing Time* (2016), *The Fraud* (2023). In addition, she has also published the essay collections *Changing My Mind* (2009), *Feel Free* (2018) and *Dead and Alive* (2025), the novella *The Embassy of Cambodia* (2013), and two collections of short stories, *Grand Union* (2019) and *Intimation* (2020), and the short story collection *The Book of Other People* (2007), which she edited, and co-authored two children's books *Weirdo* (2021) and *The Surprise* (2022) with her husband, Nick Laird. Smith writes regularly for *The New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*. Her essays and stories have appeared in various newspapers and magazines in the UK and the US. She is currently the New Books columnist for *Harper's Magazine*.

Zadie Smith has gained loaded international awards and fame for her creative talent in narratives. She is a fellow of the Royal

Society of Literature and has twice been listed as one of *Granta's* 20 Best Young British Novelists under 40. In addition to receiving much critical attention, Smith's work has won many awards, including the Whitbread First Novel Award and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *White Teeth* and the Orange Prize for Fiction for *On Beauty*, the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize shortlisted and the Women's Prize for Fiction for *NW*, as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction shortlisted for *Swing Time*. In 2016, she was awarded the Welt-Literaturpreis by the German national daily newspaper *Die Welt*. Smith received this year's City College of New York's Langston Hughes Medal in 2017. She joins a list of literary luminaries, including James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Walter Mosley, who have received the honour.

There is no doubt that we can conclude that Zadie Smith has come into the constellation of celebrated writers thanks to her literary talent and persistent writing. Her literary crown, beyond doubt, draws the attention of this paper because these praise and awards mirror a relatively authentic evaluation of the academic market and agency.

Smith's transformative and adroit techniques applied in fiction directly embody her innovative spirit and constructive deconstruction in writing. Thanks to the delicate convergence of experimental narrative devices and her severe social concerns, her writings are featured as heterogeneous in the British realist traditions, which appropriately reflects the possibly seeming paradoxical antinomy in her oeuvres. Such potential antinomy challenges the realist doctrines but endows her fiction with much import, connotation, and dialectic thinking in the postmodern context.

This paper focuses on Smith's five full-length novels and one novella. It pays scholarly attention to Smith's realist concerns including identity crises, black women's (anti-)growth, historical writing, and ethical concerns in the postmodern context. In sum, Smith tries to cross the borders of conventional realism and merges her humanistic concerns, deconstructive thoughts, and "trans-century anxiety" into her millennium oeuvres (Yang, 2009: 60).

2. Literature Review of Zadie Smith's Works

Up to now, Smith's writing career spans the first two decades of the 21st century and her oeuvres have attracted a number of studies at home or abroad. Smith has received relatively important attention among Chinese readers and researchers. Five of his novels, one novella, and two collection of essays and one short stories are all available in Chinese versions. At present, foreign research on Smith has formed a relatively diverse research perspective and achieved certain results; although domestic research on Smith starts late, it has also achieved initial results. Therefore, it is necessary to give an in-depth and well-arranged review of present researches and acceptance of Smith's novels, in order to tell research flaws and to figure out possible research gap.

2.1 Research in China

Domestic studies show its flaw of simple thematic research compared with foreign studies. This paper puts up forward two-stage formulation: the first decade has witnessed primary introduction and general research of Smith's solo novel; the second decade is full of detailed exploration and in-depth study of more than one text, especially comparative analysis.

In the first decade, domestic scholars focus on race and identity in Smith's diasporic novels. Diasporic studies dominate in the first stage, delicately outlining the profile of immigrants, ethnicity, and multiculturalism, and setting a good start for the primary introduction of Smith and her works. To be more specific, Liu (2004) primarily publishes a paper about *White Teeth* that relates to race, culture, assimilation, and conflicts. One year later, Cheng (2005) explores the problems of racial relations and national identity in contemporary British society. Li (2007) studies the different notions of national identity represented by three British immigrant generations, revealing the evolution of national identity in a multicultural era. Ma (2006) introduces readers to Smith's *On Beauty*. Luo (2009) primarily summarizes the storyline of Smith's first three novels.

From the second decade of the new millennium, the domestic studies of Smith's fiction can be seen as in-depth development. A few scholars dig out innovative themes based on various new methods, with varied foci from the diaspora, spatial writing, humanism, aesthetics, ethics, globalisation and cosmopolitanism, as well as race and identity.

Concerning the diaspora, Ma (2011) primarily carries out an in-depth analysis of the diasporic individuals in *White Teeth*, dealing with a series of topics concerning diaspora, such as diasporic individuals' national and religious complexity, diasporic communities' influence, the multi-identities of this group, and the potential ways to reduce the barriers between diasporas and host residents. Seven years later, Mr. Ma coauthoring Shi (2018), examine the identity construction in *Swing Time* from three levels: legitimacy, resistance, and project planning, according to Manuel Castells's theory of identification.

Smith's all novels do not keep away from London that takes a accommodation for Londoners' identification. As for London's function in shaping characters and their identity, some papers explore the relationship between urban space and identity construction. The most important and highly cited article is Professor Wang Zhuo (2015: 99) interprets the ethical identity between "subject" and "object", "self" and "other", "host" and "guest" through Nie Zhenzhao's ethical literary criticism. Zhao (2016), using space criticism theory and national cultural studies, explores the various individual subjects and groups in London urban space after WWII in *White Teeth*.

Song (2017) explores, in *On Beauty*, how beauty reflects Smith's response and reflection on Forster's idea of "only connect" by revealing the dilemma in racial, political, and interpersonal connection in the new era. Putting the text in the context of liberal humanism represented by Matthew Arnold and E. M. Forster, Professor Song connects the text with the cultural background and foci of immigrants' dilemma, which acts as an excellent case in exterior texts and interior texts. Zhu and Guo (2019) discuss the hermeneutic view of *On Beauty* from aesthetics, ethic, culture, and politics, demonstrating Smith's embrace of aesthetic hermeneutics rather than forced interpretation.

In the past few years, Wang Zhuo has published three relatively authoritative papers concerning *Swing Time* insofar. She (2019) studies narrative ethics and political identity in *Swing Time* and Smith's aesthetic view in creation. In the sequent year, she and Shang (2020) digs out Smith's globalization dilemma and transnational writing by interpreting West Africa as a geographical space, the meaning of Aimee as a transnational sign, and the

meaning of narrator's trip to Africa. Moreover, Wang acutely defines dance as an adroit metaphor and thread in *Swing Time* and regards it as a cultural meme in synthesizing characters and themes, mainly embodied in the slave's physical and African memory.

Zheng (2018) compares Smith's *Swing Time* and Chi's *Goodnight, Rose*, by exploring the characters' different attitudes towards violence, concluding people can tend to be cosmopolitan and accommodate uniqueness and otherness in identification through forgiveness and stereotype reconciliation. Zheng (2018) also discusses the blackness in *Swing Time* from racial trauma and race. She (2023) explores the Haitian painting and the writing of history in *On Beauty*. Zhang (2025) analyzes memory collision and variations of beautybased on the portrait writing in *On Beauty*.

Xu Bin (2019) likens the anxiety of losing teeth in *White Teeth* to the British-colored immigrants' racial crisis. Nie Wei (2021) focuses on the self-invention of second-generation immigrants in NW, arguing British economic and occupational environment paralyse possible opportunities for second-generation immigrants to achieve self-fulfilment. Wang and Duan (2024) turns due attention to technology, body, and posthuman bioethics in *White Teeth*. Wang and Liu (2024) explores narrative techniques and ethical expression in NW.

2.2 Research Abroad

Foreign studies of Smith's works are carried out mainly concerning spatial writing, multiculturalism, trauma, cosmopolitanism, female comradeship, race, identity, ethics, the perspective of "Post-theory", and features of narratives.

London acts as ethical construction and ethical agenda in Smith's novels, underlying the moral role of a place/space constructing characters' identities. Gerzina (2002) analyses Smith's global writing, arguing that globalisation is the local, in all its geographic clarity, that is, the metonym standing for much more than mere location. Slavin (2015) emphasises NW's effect on people's life and contends that London as a space shapes the two main protagonists Leah and Natalie's lives, growth and life choices. Rahmat (2017) studies the dynamic tension of aesthetics and narrative between nation and politics in terms of inclusion and exclusion, from a multi-dimension, considers the tension of aesthetics and narratives. In addition, Ulrike Pirker (2016) different from Rahmat's aesthetic portrayal of London, argues that Smith refines London as an ethical agenda: an emphasis on the necessity to engage critically and responsibly with space.

Thanks to its position as an international metropolis, London draws many immigrants to flood in for living and work. In doing so, multiculturalism and hybridity act as indispensable topics and social issues in this city and many critics reach a consensus on multiculturalism in *White Teeth*. In an early academic response, Squires (2002) explores Smith's complex relationship to multiculturalism and hybridity by considering Smith reflecting Britain's massive influx of immigrants and changing demographics. Head (2003) regards the breadth of mixed-race identity as parallel to that of the novel, similar to Squires' commentary, its diverse reflection of contemporary Britain. Moore-Gilbert (2005) opines that *White Teeth* represents the contemporary intercultural relations, including those between metropolitan minorities of "New Commonwealth" origin and Jews, rest on a model of interaction. Moss (2003) thinks that *White Teeth* is not an outright celebration of hybridity, nor is it a denunciation of the

processes that have led to such hybridity; in fact, it acts as part of the practice of everyday life.

Smith is very concerned with the writing of London's multiculturalism, an core issue in the modern Britain. Dyer (2004) foregrounds certain inter-textual elements and priorities Smith's ethnicity in a particular manner. Matz (2017) points out that Smith makes the absurdities of cultural diversity a humorous way to explore myths of identity. Braun (2013) argues that Smith's vision of multiculturalism is made complex by genetic discourses contrasting with personal and familial history. Perfect (2014) explains that *White Teeth* explicitly celebrates multiculturalism in London for its ultimate "sameness" of different ethnic and cultural groups. Ciribuco (2017) discusses the literary representation of multiculturalism-mafia imagery. McCallum (2012) studies streets and transformation in *White Teeth* and "Stuart", coined by the author, which refers to a story reminding readers that Europe is not a homogeneous entity. Lau (2009) discusses Asian identity and daily collisions in London, a site of multiculturalism and transculturation, following Bhabha's hybridity theory. In short, multiculturalism in Smith's novel refers to heterogeneity, diversity, and hybridity in terms of immigrants, demographics, race, ethnicity, and identity.

Besides the topics of spatial writing, and multiculturalism, trauma, in the same vein, take an important role in Smith's literary creation. For example, in the interview "White Teeth: A Conversation with Author Zadie Smith" (2002), Smith admits that trauma takes generations to get over, and the world war can be regarded as an excellent example of historical trauma. Trauma in fact is woven into Smith's literary writing and also is brought to the fore by some scholars.

Tancke (2011) discusses the critical phrase "original traumas" in *White Teeth* and contends that it, at the core of the glocal reality, repeats itself in a fundamental sense, creating pain and suffering—new variants of trauma—as it is being worked through. In *The Autograph Man*, Jorge Berastegui Wood explores trauma and healing, explaining how human beings try to escape the psychological effects of traumatic events instead of facing up with painful feelings and psychical changes. Beatriz Pérez Zapata is an excellent expert in studying Zadie Smith's novels, having published a few authortive papers and one monograph. Zapata (2015) addresses the history of the Cambodian genocide and the history of the protagonist in *The Embassy of Cambodia*, and explores the juxtaposition between individual and collective traumatic experiences through Michael Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory. She (2020) analyses *The Autograph Man*'s post-secularism and trauma in general, and dissusses the portrayal of mourning and grief, and explores different spiritual traditions' roles in Alex's working process. Philips Tew asserts that Will Self and Zadie Smith both depict, in the post-Thatcherite London, insistently cartographies of suffering, traumatic and traumatological realities of urban selfhood, arguing that trauma's apparent belatedness (rendering its origins as elusive and unattainable) is less critical particularly post-9/11 than the traumatological, or a sense of immediate, attributable potential threats permeating the social and cultural conditions. Trauma can be found in the corners of Smith's fictional world, related to collective history and memory.

Partly due to Zadie Smith's transnational identity and consciousness of globalisation, she brings cosmopolitanism and transnationalism to the fore in fiction and portrays, which draws

regard of some scholars. Batra (2010) asserts that in *On Beauty*, Smith's profoundly ironical take on the "cosmopolitanism" of transnational academic exchanges of the kindness epitomised by characters' personal and institutional affiliations that engages with class-specific racialised identities but leaves unresolved problems of racialised gender and sexuality outside the corporate academy of the 21st century. In addition, Batra further discusses that Smith's fictionalisation of the Black diaspora underscores transnational dimensions of Black Studies. Through an analysis of the ethical values of hospitality and openness, Shaw (2017) demonstrates that *NW* deviates away from celebratory multiculturalism in Britain, interrogating the struggle between critical cosmopolitanism and melancholia in a 21st-century urban environment. This contention opposes Heather Childress Custer's statement that *NW* is preoccupied with human connectedness and social responsibility, while *White Teeth* documents a change in mood reflective of "post-catastrophe" England. What should be noticed is that Rogers (2008) discusses the critique of cosmopolitanism pictured in *White Teeth* and other similar post-colonial perspectives on hybridity without resorting to cosmopolitanism's supposed opposite patriotism. Rogers opines that Timothy Brennan's "Cosmo-theory" leads to increased cultural hegemony and thus further marginalisation, which are untenable nature of cosmopolitanism working in Smith's complex characters.

In a short nutshell, Smith's cosmopolitanism construction in her works is far from Utopian regarding race, gender, inequality, cultural hegemony, and marginalisation. That is to say, the so-called cosmopolitanism by no means serves as the best medicine to solve social disease in Britain.

Smith, as a black female writer, naturally obtains much sympathy from her fellowmen, which is mainly embodied in her black female characters and female friendship built with each other. A few pieces of research have turned attention to female comradeship that is typically portrayed in *NW* and *On Beauty*. Judith Taylor concludes that young women should promote friendship moralities that are based on self-reliance rather than investing quite so much in friendship as salvation and autonomy is the new interconnection. King (2009: 263) opines that feminist creolist perspectives, as epitomised by Erzulie, shape *On Beauty*'s form and characterisation and create space for the emergence of "the erotic as resource" between black women. In brief, the friendship between black women in *NW* and *On Beauty* foregrounds the possibility of connection by tolerating differences and the beauty of humanity.

Scholars usually interpret race and racial relationships by borrowing concepts or dictums from other critics and writers, such as the metaphor of crossroad, Forster's "only connect," based on David Lodge's metaphor of the crossroads (when he wondered which directions the novelist of the second half of the twentieth century could take), as well as Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of lines of "segmentarity." Van Amelsvoort (2018) interprets Zadie Smith's novel *NW* as an attempt to link E. M. Forster's famous dictum "only connect" with Paul Gilroy's concept of "conviviality", based on the two friends, Leah and Natalie, who are constituted by boundaries of class, race, and ethnicity but who also contest those limits pointing to the difficulties faced by many contemporary European minorities.

Related to Smith's diasporic identity, her characters are endowed with mixed race and ethnicity, which features all her novels and

draws scholars' attention. In Smith's books today, race and ethnicity are not absent from her eloquent characterisation.

Many postcolonial critics project onto Smith's work neo-liberal, multicultural positivism, the very perspective her novel parodies and subverts. At the same time, some reviewers place their focus on race and relative themes of race. Dawson (2007) illustrates that Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* offers us a timely warning that the history of "race" is by no means over by exploring the contemporary return of eugenics. Mindy McMann (2012), based on Paul Gilroy's claim that the genetic manipulations of DNA may create whole new boundaries for understanding difference and identity, zeroes in on the ways that Smith's novel insists on ironically exposing the postwar histories of race and genetics even as it ends on a note of optimism. Taheri (2017) focuses on how Smith has foregrounded such post-racialism in her narrative by focusing on the immigrant's body assigned to upset the long-cherished binary of us-and-them, redefining the notion of race and undoing its associated physical features.

Besides race and identity in characterization, ethics acting as an essential aspect of human, likewise plays a core role in Smith's realist novels. What should not be neglected is the elaborate discovery that some scholars join beauty or aesthetics with ethics. Tolan (2013) points out Zadie Smith's Forsterian ethics in *White Teeth*, *The Autograph Man*, *On Beauty*, suggesting that a sustained ethical inquiry—was mainly prompted by Forster but also indebted to contemporary moral philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum and Elaine Scarry. Childs and Green (2013) discuss aesthetics and ethics in *White Teeth*, *The Autograph Man*, and *On Beauty*, praising Smith's contribution to reconnecting ethics and aesthetics and to constructing a globalised world of social and ethnic complexity. Vanessa Guignery explores the crossroad's metaphorical meaning in Smith's *NW*, which can be viewed as ethical connections between characters besides geographical journeys across London. Głab (2016) interprets *On Beauty* as a kind of ethical laboratory of beauty based on the beauty-goodness-truth triad. In sum, ethics in Smith's novels acts as a bridge connecting individuals together by breaking boundaries in the hierachical system in terms of race, gender, and class.

It is in the 21st century that Smith published a sequence of her novels, and it is this new age that is bombarded by the initiative of multiple post-theories and methodologies, in which several critics tend to apply the perspective of "post-ism", like postcolonialism, postracism, postfeminism, and post-postmodernism. Many scholars regard Smith's postcolonial writing in *NW*, including Custer, Annalisa, and María Lourdes. Custer (2014) engages in a postcolonial analysis of contemporary multicultural life in London by borrowing Paul Gilroy's Postcolonial Melancholia. Annalisa Pes explores post-postcolonial issues and identities in *NW*. López-Ropero (2016) analyses *NW* from postcolonialism and postfeminism and contends that Smith points to the prevalence of racial and gender inequalities, problematising individualistic notions of failure as self-responsibility, rather than adopting a celebratory approach to her postfeminist subjects as harbingers of social change. Alberto explores the legacies of Virginia Woolf's modernist lens in *NW* through a joint queer theory and postcolonial reading. Taheri (2018) discusses post-colonialism in *White Teeth* through the immigrant's body symbolised by white teeth, and identity would be a matter of becoming. Regarding *Swing Time*, Baillie (2019) brings together debates about postracial and post-black with conceptualisations of the trans-nation that destabilise

the alignment of race and gender with nationalism, by using Morrison's considerations of globalisation, nationhood, and race. Zapata (2021) applies post-secularism and traumatic theory to explore the portrayal of mourning and grief in *The Autograph Man* and further analyses the functions of spiritual traditions in Alex's working through.

Zadie Smith is a novelist acclaimed as "one of Britain's great stylistic chameleons" due to her diverse styles and forms (Holmes, 2013: 141). Smith's inheritance of realism has won celebration and denouncement of scholars. Wood primarily writes a particularly critical comments on *White Teeth* because of its redundancy of realism, entitled "Human, All Too Inhuman" for the *New Republic*, declaring, "This is not magical realism. It is hysterical realism.... The conventions of realism are not being abolished but, not the contrary, exhausted, and overworked" (Wood 2008). However, Hadjetian (2014: 96) categorizes *White Teeth* as magical realism based on its "magic and unbelievable elements" and "realistic elements and historical events". Martin (2019: 582-583) defines *On Beauty* as "feminist realism" because it confronts readers with the fatalistic reality shaping women's "intersectional experiences of real women in their positions as subjects and objects" and "the aestheticization of women's bodies". James (2013: 204) regards *NW* as "wounded realism" referring to conventional realism challenged by Joyce and retained the wound, thanks to Smith's "accretive presentation of scenes" in describing sensory and spatial details illuminated along the way rather than pedestrian movement from one action to the next.

Besides, hybrid narrative techniques used in *NW* have raised the academic awareness of scholars such as Wendy Knepper, Vanessa Guignery, Nick Bentley, and Fernández-Carballo. Knepper (2013) demonstrates that *NW* is a highly experimental, revisionary late modernist novel. Guignery (2013) calls Smith's fusion of modernist and postmodernist styles a "joyful mélange" and praises the novel's intertextuality. In a subsequent piece, Guignery (2014) mentions the "playful dimension" of *NW* and highlights some of its allusions to notable figures and artists. Bentley (2018: 723) contrasts *NW* and *Cloud Atlas* (2004) in terms of how effectively both employ postmodernist techniques like "fragmentation, intertextual intricacy, and metafictive playfulness," and he concludes *NW* is an example of "trailing postmodernism". Fernández Carballo (2016: 77) highlights the narrator's humor and discusses *NW*'s metamodernist techniques, including "psychological accuracy, affective detachment from totalizing ideologies and stylistic experimentation," by comparing it with Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Mellet (2013) aligns Smith, due to her *NW*, with other writers, in particular, discussing "metafictional devices" applied by Jonathan Coe, Ian McEwan, Tim Pears and Pat Barker, and Smith who unfold or expand imaginary or real events in space-time to fill the vacuum of characters. This term refers to experimental fiction but does not so much distance itself from postmodernism.

3. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the present researches in China and abroad presents the overall characteristics of diversification, but there are also obvious foci. Three key words run through almost all important research findings: (1) identity. The interpretation of multiple identity consciousness, such as racial identity, gender identity, class identity, and cosmopolitan citizenship identity, become the key to decode Smith's complex literary codes; (2) postcolonial perspective. Whether it is the study

of identity writing, spatial displacement or multiculturalism, its historical and cultural background, as well as theoretical framework refer to the postcolonial lens; (3) style. Smith's innovative tries in narrative styles present her embrace of traditional realism and avant-garde under strong influences of postmodern deconstruction.

However, we can also clearly realize that there are still some shortcomings and problems in the current research, mainly reflected in the following three points.

First, most studies of identity fall into a post-colonial stereotype. Smith's novels' backgrounds mostly span the second half of 20th century to the first decade of 21st century, and de facto, such period can be categorized as postmodern time. The development of economic globalization during this period, political, economic, cultural and other factors have direct or indirect impact on identity construction. Therefore, it is a more tenable to focus on the influence of social macro environment on identity.

Second, few studies deal with style and form of Smith's fiction at home. Smith's five novels have completely different narrative styles and adopt different narrative voices and strategies, which reflects her bold attempts and practices of style. Most studies fail to examine her narrative strategies in the genealogy of the Britain realist tradition, nor do they value her position and contribution in contemporary Britain realist literature.

Third, there is insufficient exploration of postmodern influences in Smith's works. The current research focuses more on identity in the post-colonial framework and less on the influence of postmodernity on identity. However, in fact, as a writer born and bred in the postmodern period, Smith is deeply influenced by deconstruction and maintained a skeptical attitude towards cultural authenticity. Only by fully exploring the postmodern elements in her works and comprehensively analyzing their influence on the theme of identity, can the unique realistic care and humanistic concern of Smith's works be further extracted, so as to avoid falling into the post-colonial stereotype and be truly based on the text and reality.

All in all, there are three suggestions given in order to bridge possible research gap in the present research concerning Smith's works: (1) explaining Smith's identity issues and her realist writing in the genealogical nexus between realism and postmodern realism; (2) connecting her realist concerns with her adroit narrative styles in the postmodern context; (3) applying related ethical criticism to express Chinese position and to convey Chinese voice in order to interpreting Smith's ethical concerns for identity in the postmodern context. In doing so, future studies of Smith's fiction can be anchored in the delicate revaluation of Smith's in-depth agent of realist concerns for social issues in the postmodern London.

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