

Beyond an Illusion of Comfort: Two Examples of Chinese Healing Style Media

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, 2019

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## Abstract

Healing style (zhiyu xi 治愈系) media refers to the various products and services labelled with a promise to comfort consumers, and the media category has gradually become viewed as a way to cope with the omnipresent stress and anxiety of modern life. However, there are widespread criticisms of healing style media regarding creating the illusion of comfort for temporary relaxation to avoid facing and addressing the problems that cause discomfort. To counter such biased accusations this thesis examines two types of Chinese healing style media, fiction and anime, to address two main research questions: 1) Whether and how Chinese healing style media respond to the problems people face in real life? 2) How do Chinese healing style media present healing?

The textual analyses of the novel *Rushan, Gushu and Me* reveal that Chinese healing style literature is not creating the illusion of comfort but focuses on the emotional relationship crisis suffered by Chinese people and offers practical solutions with four main steps that integrate the theory and practice of psychotherapy. In the presentation of healing, Chinese healing style writers are inclined to utilize some typical healing elements like character settings that resonate with most people and adequate sensory descriptions.

Interpretations combined with screenshots of the anime film *The Legend of Hei* reinforce the argument that Chinese healing style is not just a comforting fictional world but very concerned with the living space and environmental crises caused by rapid urbanization and emphasizes the importance of reliable intimate relationships in coping with the crises in modern life. In *The Legend of Hei*, the use of healing elements like natural scenery and colors, resonant

characters, delicious foods and positive attitudes all contribute to presenting healing and cater to the psychological needs of the target viewers.

Through critically analyzing Chinese healing style fiction and anime, this thesis affirms that they are not escaping but actively presenting the collective crises and providing solutions. This study defends the rationality and effectiveness of Chinese healing style media as one of the many ways to cope with numerous pressures of modern life, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding and more appropriate application of Chinese healing style media.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### Rationale and Research Questions for This Study

Healing style<sup>1</sup> refers to *iyashi-kei* in Japanese and *zhiyu xi* 治愈系 in Chinese which emphasizes releasing psychological stress through various media from literature to anime, music, video games and resorts, such as the novels of Japanese authors Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto, or the Japanese anime *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Natsume's Book of Friends*. They are some of the representative examples of various healing style media<sup>2</sup> that give people who are under pressure caused by a complex combination of economic, political, emotional, or environmental factors, a chance to catch their breath.



Figure 1 Poster of *My Neighbor Totoro*



Figure 2 Poster of *Natsume's Book of Friends*

Such relaxing media received widespread popularity among consumers in Japan in the 1990s and formed a healing boom along with vendors' marketing. Through years of growth, the Japanese healing style has developed into a comprehensive cultural system covering many fields such as music, literature, animation, film and television, and has evolved into a cultural

<sup>1</sup> Roquet translate *iyashi-kei shōsetsu* to healing style novel in his book *Ambient media: Japanese atmospheres of self* on page 155. This proposal follows his translations.

<sup>2</sup> The term healing style media is used by Roquet in *Ambient media: Japanese atmospheres of self* on page 170. I use it to refer to all *iyashi* products and services, or as some scholars call them, *iyashi* goods.

consumer product with the globalization of consumerism. The healing style media has not only brought significant benefits to Japan's cultural industry but has also reaped considerable cultural recognition overseas. China, as a neighboring country to Japan, is one of the most noticeable of these.

It is not difficult to understand the popularity of Japanese healing style in China, where Chinese people, who are living in a post-industrial society similar to Japan's, are similarly under great psychological pressure and therefore have a desire for healing. In 2012, a survey conducted by the social survey center of *China Youth Daily* on 15,666 people nationwide showed that 76.2% of people confessed that they were stressed, and 85.6% would choose healing style media to resolve their stress.<sup>3</sup> To understand this pressure and the need for healing style requires a certain knowledge of the context in which the consumers of healing style live. In general, even though the one-child policy implemented between 1980 and 2015 reduced the birth rate, China is still the most populous country in the world. Although the territory is large, resources such as education, health care, employment and capital are mainly concentrated in the coastal region. As a result, the several generations born after the 1980s faced fierce competition for higher education and employment. *China Newsweek* posted a piece of news titled "Highest ever number of 10.76 million graduates" in April 2022.<sup>4</sup> In the comments section of this news on *Weibo*<sup>5</sup>, very ironically, a user compiled screenshots of news about

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<sup>3</sup> Huang Chong 黄冲. "85.6% shou fang zhe hui xuan ze 'zhi yu xi' hua jie ya li" 85.6%受访者会选择“治愈系”化解压. *China Youth Daily*, May 2012. [http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2012-05/08/nw.D110000zgqnb\\_20120508\\_2-07.htm](http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2012-05/08/nw.D110000zgqnb_20120508_2-07.htm). Accessed May 10, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Chen Weishan 陈惟杉. "Shishang zuiduo biyesheng 1076 wan" 史上最多毕业生 1076 万. *China Newsweek*, April 2022. [https://weibo.com/ttarticle/x/m/show/id/2309404758137902334415?\\_wb\\_client=1](https://weibo.com/ttarticle/x/m/show/id/2309404758137902334415?_wb_client=1). Accessed May 12, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> It is one of the biggest social media platforms in China. Many people interpret it as a Chinese version of *Twitter*.

record-high numbers of graduates and their employment difficulties every year since 2015 (See Figure 3). From these pieces of news, it is clear that at least from 2015 to the present, the number of college graduates has been increasing year by year. However, their employment situation has not improved or even gotten worse in the past decade.

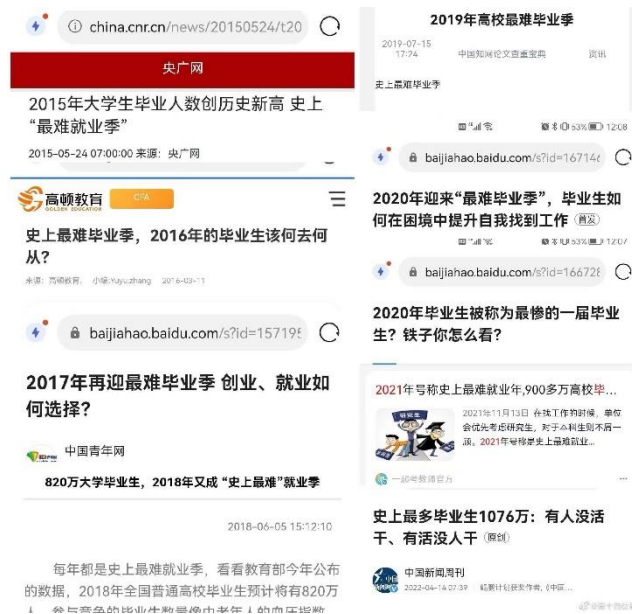


Figure 3 The Screenshots of News on the Hardest Years of Employment for Graduates

Moreover, China’s urbanization and industrialization took place rapidly after 1978 and was on its way to becoming the largest economy with an annual average growth rate of 9.8 per cent for over three decades (1978–2009) (Huang and Yu 23). This has led to a significantly faster pace of life. People’s workload and working hours have increased. At the same time, the excessive growth of housing prices has exacerbated the stress of living. Along with the rapid social transformation, people’s inner bewilderment and uncertainty about their future have been intensified. In this situation, the public requires effective ways for releasing their stress and anxiety. However, in terms of ideology, on the one hand, compared to the Maoist years, the Chinese public in this period do not have a deified spiritual leader. On the other hand, the one-

party political system restricts the popular ideology to a great extent. For example, the content of mass media is subject to strict censorship from the government. This results in relatively limited outlets for Chinese people to release their unprecedented stress compared to many other countries. Fortunately, the characteristics of the healing style allow it to have the advantage of being virtually free of politics, violence, pornography, gambling, drugs, and other elements that are illegal in China. Under such circumstances, with the rise of consumer culture, healing style equipped with a variety of media forms became popular with many consumers in China.

Born and raised in China with a large population, I experienced first-hand the aforementioned competitive college entrance exams and the confusion of working in a big city after graduating from university. On top of that, I have also had the experience of studying and working in Taiwan and Canada. My first-hand experiences studying and working in different societies have prompted me to critically reflect on the overwhelming anxiety and competition experienced by young people in China. Since then, I have become interested in how people find outlets for such anxieties and problems and started to notice healing style media.

Specific examples of the popularity of healing style in China and the use of healing style media by young Chinese people to cope with stress can be seen in the aforementioned news report from *China Youth Daily*. This piece of news documented interviews with young people working in Beijing and Guangzhou, two of the largest cities in northern and southern China, regarding their use of healing style media. Shen Bin, who just entered the job market a year ago in Beijing, tells the journalist that his lack of experience and self-confidence makes him feel increasingly psychological pressure. Since he has no relatives or friends in Beijing, he has

to face all the pressure alone. Whenever he is in a bad mood, he likes healing himself by enjoying healing style pets online. “The calm expression and leisurely posture of Shironeko (See Figure 4)<sup>6</sup>, and the innocent eyes and naive look of Shunsuke (See Figure 5)<sup>7</sup> always make the bad mood disappear. As long as Shironeko and Shunsuke are still cute, the world becomes wonderful. I can always find comfort from them,” Shen Bin says (Huang Chong, *China Youth Daily*). Yao Xiaojun, a white-collar worker in Guangzhou, is not alone like Shen Bin. He lives with his family but still needs the help of healing style media. He tells the journalist that he is under a lot of pressure due to excessive housing and gas prices, too many assessments at work and heavy family responsibilities but he is unwilling to talk with his family about his sufferings. When he is depressed, he chooses to watch some healing style short films, animations and movies. For example, the hilarious Korean TV series *Bernard* and the Japanese healing style anime *Shirokuma Cafe* always help him forget worries and feel better. “I think that the healing style is very helpful in relieving stress. Healing myself with healing style media also makes my family worry less about me,” Yao Xiaojun says (Huang Chong, *China Youth Daily*).



Figure 4 Shironeko



Figure 5 Shunsuke

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<sup>6</sup> The name of a cat. He is known as the “Zen master cat” and the most relaxed cat in the world.

<sup>7</sup> The name of a Pomeranian. He has the laurels of the cutest dog in Japan and has 55,000 Internet fans that check his pages every day to view his newest stories.

The examples above illustrate the healing power that healing style media gives to stressed Chinese people. While acknowledging healing style as a way to relieve stress, this news report also identifies some doubts about it. In the survey, 50.9% of people think that they can choose healing style but they also need to have a strong and brave heart to face stress. 46.3% of people point out that instead of using healing style media alone, they should communicate more with others. In the face of these challenges, this report quotes Wei Zhizhong, a researcher at the Modern Psychology Research Center of Wuhan University, who believes that “it is important to treat stress in a diversified way” (Huang Chong, *China Youth Daily*).

There are also many scholars and critics who question this kind of healing power. The criticisms are mainly that the healing style is good at creating the illusion of comfort for people in trouble, which is a way to evade solving problems that cause the trouble; critics and their comments will be introduced in detail in the next chapter. Specifically, in the cases of Shen Bin and Yao Xiaojun mentioned above, those healing style animals and anime make them feel relaxed, comfortable and interested so they can temporarily forget their worries and achieve the so-called healing. However, those cut and funny healing style cannot effectively help them solve the specific problems they face. Shen Bin did not actively seek ways to build confidence or accumulate work experience, and Yao Xiaojun did not fight against the overly competitive work environment or question the exorbitant housing prices. Instead of bravely confronting the problems themselves, they both hide in the comfort provided by the healing style to release the stress brought by the issues.

Nevertheless, I do not agree with the biased criticism. I argue that not all healing style

media rely solely on creating comfort to heal users. There are also many healing style media that advocate responding actively to, rather than avoiding, dilemmas that most Chinese people face. In this thesis, my main research questions are whether and how Chinese healing style media respond to the crisis faced by most Chinese people and how Chinese healing style media present healing. I will answer these questions in the third and fourth chapters by evaluating a Chinese healing style novel and a Chinese healing style anime, respectively.

### **Rationale for Case Studies**

The novel I will analyze is *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, the debut full-length novel published in 2017 by Su Hei, a healing style writer from Hong Kong, China. The anime I will examine is *The Legend of Hei*, an anime movie directed by Mtjj, released in 2019. The reasons for choosing them lie in both their popularity and the values that they offer to the argument of this research.

First of all, in terms of the selection of the novel, the most popular healing style literature in the book market of China are still the Chinese translations of novels by Japanese healing style writers such as Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto. Searching for the most popular healing novels or authors in Chinese search engines, most of the results show more or less the books of Japanese authors. The popularity of local Chinese healing style literature is not obvious in the face of the overwhelming dominance of its Japanese pioneers. Also, with the development of the media, healing style has received wider popularity in China in the form of variety shows rather than novels. However, it would be unjust and non-objective to deny or ignore the existence of Chinese healing style literature. It is necessary to critically analyze its

value and inadequacy.

Secondly, in the screening of Chinese healing style literature, a lot of reading was done to remove the so-called chicken soup for the soul (*xinling jitang* 心灵鸡汤) literature that flooded the book market in the first half of the 2010s, which is also labelled as healing style and is the main target of the above-mentioned criticism. There is also another popular stream of healing style literature, which focuses on the use of psychotherapeutic knowledge in fictional novels and whose authors often have a background in studying or working as psychotherapists. For instance, the books of Bi Shumin from mainland China, Su Hei from Hong Kong and Zhang Defen from Taiwan. This category of writers not only retains some of the characteristics of the healing style writers of the first half of the 2010s in terms of the use of healing elements, such as scenery, music, food and characters but also brings into play the expertise of psychotherapy to justify the elusive so-called healing.

This tendency to incorporate psychotherapeutic knowledge into fictional novels is not difficult to be observed among Japanese healing style writers as well. Both Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto have had exchanges with Hayao Kawai, Japan's most prominent Jungian analyst. Haruki Murakami also published a book with Hayao Kawai called *Haruki Murakami Goes to Meet Hayao Kawai*. This book records a two-day wide-ranging conversation between the two in 1995, which involved fiction and healing. Haruki Murakami has been more conscious of reaching into the psychological level of his readers in his subsequent works. This is reflected in *Kafka on the Shore*, published in 2002, and *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, published in 2013. In Li Yaqi's study on the

correspondence between the healing in Haruki Murakami's novels and psychotherapy, she analyzes the similarities between the content of his novel and psychotherapy, using the example of *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*. She asserts that, "as a work in which Haruki Murakami returns to the exploration of personal psychology and social relationships, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* has distinctive traces of the use of psychotherapy" (Y. Li 40).

For the above reasons, I analyze the relatively more recent Chinese healing style novels that emerged in the second half of the 2010s, incorporating psychotherapeutic knowledge. Based on the scores of these authors' books on the rating sites, the representativeness of healing cases in the stories, as well as my personal preferences, I selected Su Hei's first full-length novel, *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, as one of the primary materials of this thesis. Compared to the other two Chinese authors mentioned above, whose books' ratings on *Douban* range from about 60% to 90%, Su Hei's books have a more stable rating of around 80%. In addition, Su Hei has published more books than Zhang Defen. Su Hei is a diligent writer who has published more than a dozen books and some of her books have sold over a million copies. In terms of content, Su Hei's books are more unified on the topic of emotional relationships, while the genres and themes of Bi Shumin's books are more diverse. *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, Su Hei's first published novel, received an additional printing only two months after its publishing. The story deals with themes such as betrayal in love, lack of maternal love, abandonment by parents and abortion. This makes this novel present a rich case of healing emotional crisis. Furthermore, the author, Su Hei, is an experienced psychotherapist who is regarded as the leading emotional healing

writer in the Chinese-speaking world. She is also employed by the Department of Sociology at Peking University as the first supervisor for the growth of students. She has treated a large number of cases, which ensures that the emotional dilemmas she presents in the novel have a certain representativeness. The wealth of practical psychotherapeutic knowledge in this novel and its focus on the interpersonal crisis facing most Chinese people today provide rich evidence for my argument.

I chose *The Legend of Hei*, an anime movie released in 2019, as another primary source of analysis for this thesis because it has a near-perfect rating, 9.9/10, on *Bilibili*, the most popular video site for young people in China. On this site, the movie *The Legend of Hei* has a total of 48,174,000 views.<sup>8</sup> In the same year, the Japanese subtitled version of this film was released in Japan and extended for a longer run due to the positive response. Then, in 2020, a Japanese dubbed version of this film was released. As of January 25, 2021, *The Legend of Hei*'s cumulative viewership in Japan has exceeded 360,000 people and the box office has reached 560 million JPY, setting a box office record for overseas releases of Chinese animated films.<sup>9</sup> This is a sign of the recognition of Chinese healing style anime in Japan. In fact, as early as 2011, *The Legend of Hei* has been serialized in the form of short videos of about 5 minutes in length on *Bilibili*, and from 2018 in the form of a manga. A paper version of manga was published as early as 2015. In 2021, the director Mtjj said on his social media platform that a second film of *The Legend of Hei* is in preparation. The decade-long development of *The*

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<sup>8</sup> Here is a link to the homepage of *The Legend of Hei* on *Bilibili*.

[https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/media/md28221675/?spm\\_id\\_from=666.25.b\\_6d656469615f6d6f64756c65.2](https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/media/md28221675/?spm_id_from=666.25.b_6d656469615f6d6f64756c65.2)

<sup>9</sup> He He 何和. “《Luo Xiaohei Zhanji》riben piaofang 5.6 yi riyuan , chuang zhongguo donghua dianying haiwai faxing piaofang jilu” 《罗小黑战记》日本票房 5.6 亿日元,创中国动画电影海外发行票房纪录. *China Film News*, January 27, 2021. <http://www.xn--fiqs8sr9gzmd215a.com/Html/2021-01-27/5582.html>. Accessed June 18, 2022.

*Legend of Hei* from short video to manga and then to film form has shown that it has loyal fans and that its popularity has stood the test of time. Since there is no tight continuity between their respective storytelling, and many of the characters appearing in the film are not in the previous shorts, this thesis only uses the film as a source of analysis and does not cover the content of *The Legend of Hei* in the form of shorts and manga.

### **Purpose of This Study**

Beginning from the formation of the healing boom at the end of the 1990s in Japan to the present day, the history of healing style is just over two decades long. Scholars have yet to give a thorough explanation of its emergence and the popularity that continues today in China. This research seeks to trace the transnational wave of healing style from Japan to neighboring countries and provide readers with an overview of the history of the healing style in Japan and China, including the widespread criticism it has been receiving. On top of that, the overriding purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, it provides a new perspective examining the positive response of Chinese healing style to the dilemmas faced by Chinese people in opposition to widespread criticism of healing style for creating the illusion of comfort leading users to avoid addressing problems that cause discomfort. Second, this thesis explores the ways in which different media (literature and anime) present healing (*iyashi*) so that people with healing (*iyashi*) needs can better use healing style media to cope with the corresponding daily anxiety or mood disorder, which is beneficial to their psychological and closely related physical health. After all, not many people would be willing to make an appointment with a counselor for daily mood fluctuations while mass media can be a very accessible way to self-regulate emotions in

the sense that, for instance, after a tiring day at work, we can easily find a healing style movie online to relax and, ideally, end a busy day in a pleasant way, with a happy mood and a good expectation of the next day. This kind of mood regulation is very necessary because it can help us, in some way, to clear bad emotions in time to prevent accumulation. Especially during the current pandemic of COVID-19, many people have to reduce going out, avoid gathering, and keep their distance or even isolate themselves from others. At the same time, the stress from life and work does not decrease but probably increases due to more uncertainty and reduced convenience. In this context, the technique of self-regulating emotional ups and downs using ubiquitous media is becoming more in demand and penetrates into daily life even if people are not aware of it.

## **Methodology**

Chapter 3 examines how the healing style novel, *Rushan Gushu and Me* responds to difficulties Chinese people encounter and how it presents healing, by using close reading and textual analysis. The comments by the novel's readers and the scholarly analysis of other researchers are also referred to for the purpose of supporting my analysis.

Chapter 4 pairs screenshots with interpretive analyses to address how the healing style anime *The Legend of Hei* responds to the crises encountered by people in China and how it presents healing. The rationale of this method is that screenshots can be effective in exhibiting how healing style anime presents healing through distinctive scenes, character images, colors, etc. On top of that, other primary and secondary sources such as data on house prices and income, mainstream newspapers, scholarly insights from peer-reviewed journal articles and

TED talks are referred to strengthen the arguments.

In addition, the method of comparative analysis is used in Chapter 5 when summarizing the similarities and differences between the two different healing style media, literature and anime, as well as Chinese and Japanese healing style.

Regarding the Chinese-English translation used in this thesis, this study uses the Chinese novel, *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, the Chinese anime, *The Legend of Hei*, and many Chinese references. Unless specified, all translations from Chinese to English are conducted by the author. In addition, this thesis uses *pinyin* system for the romanization of Chinese terms with an explanation in English for each word and/or expression of pinyin.

### **Thesis Structure**

With the purpose of addressing whether and how Chinese healing style media respond to the collective problems encountered by people in China today and how Chinese healing style media present healing through examining two types of healing style media, the novel, *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, and the anime, *The Legend of Hei*, the research for this thesis is structured around five chapters.

Chapter One articulates the rationale for this study and source selection, introduces research questions, purpose and methodologies and describes the organization of the thesis. Chapter Two reviews the existing scholarships on the history, comparison, effectiveness, and criticisms of healing style in Japan and China. Chapter Three addresses whether and how the Chinese healing style novel, *Rushan, Gushu and Me* responds to the relationship crises and how the healing unfolds in the novel. Chapter Four examines how the Chinese healing style

anime, *The Legend of Hei* represents the issues caused by rapid urbanization and how the anime presents healing power. Chapter Five concludes by summarizing the findings, reiterating the significance of this research, acknowledging the limitations of this thesis and making recommendations for further studies.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter first introduces the mainstream view of when and how healing style emerged in Japan. On this basis, it provides a review of when and how Japanese healing style took root in China. Based on theories of world literature and the research of several scholars, this literature review also observes the differences in media forms between the popular healing style media of the two countries. Furthermore, it reviews current research on the application of healing style media and draws on theories from bibliotherapy to support the effectiveness of healing style. After gaining an overall picture of healing style in Japan and China through the above examinations, this chapter reviews current research on how different healing style media present healing to inform this thesis's analyses of the two types of healing style media. Finally, criticisms of healing style media by scholars in Japan and China are critically reviewed. Chapters 3 and 4 of this paper will refute these criticisms and demonstrate one of my main arguments in detail.

### The Concepts of *Iyashi-kei* (Healing Style) in Japan

Since the study of healing style begins with its origins, this chapter first reviews the main reasons for the rise of the healing boom in Japan and the emergence of the new Japanese word *iyashikei* (healing style) during this period. This section explains how the healing style occurred and developed from the source of the Japanese context, and it is the basis for further research on the spread of the healing style to China and its manifestation in Chinese context.

Scholars share a common argument that the *iyashi* (healing) boom is triggered by consumers who suffered severe stress from a series of problems caused by the collapse of asset

price bubbles in Japan in the early 1990s<sup>10</sup>, and needed to be healed and that many firms supplied various products and services to respond to the perceived need. Paul Roquet's book on ambient media is devoted to Japanese healing style in Chapter 6. He agrees with journalists and cultural critics who consistently point out that, the healing boom emerged directly in the aftermath of the two largest traumas in 1995 (the Kobe earthquake<sup>11</sup> and the Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attacks<sup>12</sup>). At the same time, he claims that while the economic recession and national trauma provide the emotional context for the emergence of calm as a lucrative and marketable feeling, "the marketing of these goods gives rise to advertising discourses of stress relief and healing aimed at the creation of new consumer desires and demands for self-care" (Roquet 153).

In a case study of the healing boom, Takeshi Matsui, a Japanese business scholar, analyzes the social construction of consumer needs. Rather than emphasizing the demand for healing due to a series of problems brought on by the economic recession such as national traumatic events, unemployment and so on, he argues that the consumers' needs for healing are

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<sup>10</sup> In the late 1980s, Japan's economy embarked on a period of rapid escalation in the prices of shares and real estate. The collapse of asset price bubbles in the early 1990s led to a stagnation that lasted over ten years, called the Lost Decade of the Japanese economy, and its long-lasting consequences have continued.

<sup>11</sup> The Kobe earthquake of January 17, 1995, killed, injured, and displaced thousands. Instead of providing emergency food and shelter to a disoriented population, the government asked the banks to remain open so that local residents could withdraw cash to pay for their own food and daily needs. When foreign countries offered to send in medical teams and rescue dogs to sniff out possible survivors, the government responded that its own people could handle the problem. In addition, investigations into the collapse of excessive "earthquake safe" buildings revealed widespread government corruption and graft during the years of rapid economic growth. The Japanese public was by this time thoroughly discouraged with its government and business institutions, the pillars that had produced the country's economic strength. See Suleski, Ronald. *Japan After the Bubble Burst: Traditional Values Inhibit Quick Comeback*. Ann Arbor, MI: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Barely two months after the Kobe earthquake, doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyō committed Japan's worst terrorist attack to date, spreading toxic gas through rush-hour Tokyo commuter trains just steps away from the national legislature, killing 13 commuters and injuring about 6,000 more. Although not comparable in terms of lives lost, when it comes to emotional impact this event is Japan's 9/11, but with one important difference that makes it even more shocking to the Japanese: The perpetrators are their fellow citizens, rather than foreign terrorists. Many members of Aum are highly educated young men and women from comfortable backgrounds. Such "ordinary" Japanese youth turning against the nation reinforced the impression that Japanese society as a whole is at fault. The details of the attack once again show that the social implications of the incident reach far beyond the event itself (Roquet 89).

constructed by media discourse and imitative behavior of firms, after analyzing numerous newspapers and titles of magazine articles.

The series of problems brought about by the tense political and economic environment of Japan in the 1990s manifested in various ways. Although researchers in different fields have different emphases in explaining the factors that triggered the healing boom, what is clear is that the emergence of the healing boom was related to the severe pressure suffered by Japanese people at the time and the promotion of healing products.

In addition to the above research into the reasons for the emergence of healing style, Takeshi Matsui and Paul Roquet also trace the emergence of *iyashi*-related words. The term *iyashi-kei* is not originally existing in Japanese but is a new word. It is a nominalization of the verb *iyasu* (heal). Takeshi Matsui's study reveals the changing meaning and usage of the word heal in mainstream Japanese dictionaries and annual trendy word award. In the 5th edition *Kōjien*<sup>13</sup> (1998), the verb *iyasu* means to cure somebody's disease or injury, satisfy hunger or mitigate emotional pain. In 2008, the word *iyashi-kei* (healing style) is added in the *Kōjien* 6th edition but this does not mean that the terms *iyashi* or *iyashi kei* only appeared in 2008. In fact, from evidence provided by Takeshi Matsui, it is clear that the word *iyashi* was often used in conversations since the beginning of the 21st century. For example, the word *iyashi shijō* (healing market) was included in *Gendai Yōgo no Kiso Chishiki* (Encyclopedia of Contemporary Words) a little earlier, in 2003. *The National Survey of Japanese Language* by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 2002 shows that the term *iyashi-kei* was often used by the

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<sup>13</sup> It is widely regarded as the most authoritative dictionary of Japanese. Due to its long history and popularity, Japanese people believe that *Kōjien* is a byword for the Japanese dictionary, and newspapers and magazines often cite the definition by *Kōjien* in their articles.

younger generation.

In contrast to Takeshi Matsui's study, Paul Roquet traces the emergence of the word *iyashi* back to the earlier year of 1990. He claims that the term *iyashi* first appeared in an article published in 1990 by anthropologist Ueda Noriyuki studying the medical ethnography of Sri Lankan villages, and then gradually becomes a popular expression in advertising and media as vendors are promoting a wide range of *iyashi* products and services. Such healing style media emerges in large numbers in Japan in the 1990s promising of releasing stress for the consumers.

The above review of research on when and why the healing style emerged in Japan not only provides a clear picture of the emergence and development of healing style but also prompts the need for further research on when and why the healing style was able to spread from Japan to China.

### **The Concepts of *Zhiyu xi* (Healing Style) in China**

Since the central focus of this thesis is on Chinese healing style, when it comes to the question of how healing style emerged in China, the situation is quite different from that in Japan. Chinese healing style does not originate in China but was transmitted from Japan. The Chinese term, *Zhiyu xi* (healing style) is the calque of the Japanese word *iyashi-kei*. *Zhiyu* 治愈 means *iyashi* and *xi* 系 refers to *kei* (style) in Japanese. There is no specific scholarly research on the question of when the Japanese healing style was introduced to China and when the word *zhiyu xi* appeared in Chinese. Combining the time of importation of Japanese healing style media into China and the time of popularity of Chinese healing style media, most scholars believe that it is at the end of the 2000s that Japanese healing style became popular and was

localized in China. For example, in his study of the cultural characteristics of Chinese healing style films and TV shows, Wenbin Wang reviews a series of events that mark the popularity of healing style in China by analyzing news reports related to healing style over the years, the earliest of which is “the influx of Japanese healing style literature, anime, and movies via the Internet around 2010 led to a series of ‘healing style’ labelled the best-selling local Chinese literature” (Wang 116).

Chinese *zhiyu xi* is widely recognized to have been spread from Japanese *iyashi-kei* (Pan; Yan; Li; X. Wang; Wenbin Wang; Xia). However, can the question of why the healing style came from Japan to China be explained simply by geographical proximity or the cultural relevance of the two countries? I propose that this connection can also be explained in terms of the regional economic development model behind cultural regionalization.

Due to its economic ascendancy, Japanese popular culture has been prevalent in Asia for the past few decades. In the context of the study of the regionalization of Japanese popular culture in Asia, Leo Ching, using the popularity of Japanese drama, *Oshin*, and the children-oriented anime, *Doraemon* in Asian countries as examples, argues that the prevalence of Japanese mass culture in Asian countries or the Japanese culturalist regionalism sets itself against the background of a specific regional economic development pattern--the so-called flying geese model, briefly, in which “Japan is the lead goose heading a Flying-V pattern of Asian economic geese. The other Asian countries, maintaining their respective and relative positions in the formation, are to follow and replicate the developmental experience of the Japanese and other ‘geese’ in front of them” (Leo Ching 251). This argument has some factual

basis in its overall form in the sense that other Asian countries have more or less borrowed from Japan's experience of economic development. However, when it is used to analyze individual cases, the specific conditions of each country's location, time, etc., and the critique of the development experience of pioneer countries in Asia and outside Asia need to be further considered. But at least Leo Ching's study shows us the similarities in the social development of Asian countries, especially the rapid economic growth and ensuing recession brought about by industrialization, which are also important causes of the formation of healing style in Japan as described in the last section. Therefore, there is reason to believe that there are some connections between the emergence and prevalence of healing style and the similar social development trajectories of Japan and China. As Leo Ching points out, "*Doraemon* is an animated fantasy that makes the painfulness of economic success more bearable, at least for the children of Asia. The popularity of *Doraemon* among Asian youth has been attributed to a similar allegorization from the national to the regional" (Leo Ching 250). Leo Ching's research reveals that in addition to the obvious reasons of geographical proximity and cultural relevance, the fact that the two countries experienced similar social contexts in succession was an important factor in the spread of healing style from Japan to China. The insight into the social context in which the healing style is embedded also helps to understand the refraction of healing style media on some issues facing most Chinese people today caused by rapid urbanization such as, interpersonal relationship crises, living space crises and environmental crises, which will be analyzed in the next two chapters.

### **The Different Media Forms of Healing Style in Japan and China**

Since Chinese *zhiyu xi* came from Japan, is Chinese *zhiyu xi* the same as Japanese *iyashi kei*? In his acclaimed conjectures on world literature, Franco Moretti borrows the cognitive metaphors, the tree and the wave, used by historians in analyzing culture on a world scale to describe national and world literature respectively. For example, the modern novel, as a wave that runs into the branches of local traditions, is always significantly transformed by them (Moretti 67). Can such metaphors of trees and waves aptly describe the movement of healing style from Japan to China? It is not difficult to find that the wave of healing from Japan to China is transformed and localized in the branch of China. Searching popular Chinese and Japanese healing style in search engines reveals that, one significant difference between them is that the most popular Japanese *iyashi-kei* and Chinese *zhiyu xi* appear in different media forms. Healing style uses various media such as literature, animation, music, etc., but it seems that which media form it is presented in depends on the evolution of the media itself, in other words, which media is more popular with consumers in different social situations.

In terms of Japan, Paul Roquet points out that the term *iyashi-kei* (healing style) was first used to refer to a person (often but not always female) who puts those around them at ease in the mid-1990s Japan. This later expanded to include actresses, fashion models, comedians, politicians, etc. “As a supplement to this kind of emotional labor, other healing style objects went on the market promising to help their purchasers attune to a more relaxed self, including products for a wide variety of therapeutic modalities (aromatherapy, pet therapy, color therapy, plant therapy, sound therapy, art therapy, massage therapy, sex therapy, etc.), television shows, pornography, and robots” (Roquet 152). We can clearly see healing style blossoming through

different media and it can even be traced back to its budding before the 1990s. Paul Roquet claimed that Japanese fiction began to reflect the new culture of mood regulation as early as the late 1970s with Haruki Murakami's debut novel, *Kaze no uta o kike* (Hear the wind sing, 1979) which appears more than a decade earlier than the term *iyashi-kei* (healing style) (Roquet 155).

However, the situation in China is quite different. Due to the sequence of industrialization and the importation or borrowing of Japanese *iyashi kei*, Chinese *zhiyu xi* not only emerged much later but it is difficult to distinguish the successive emergence of different media forms. The highest-rated Chinese healing style media on book and movie rating websites<sup>14</sup>, surprisingly but logically, are variety shows. Some Chinese-produced variety shows such as *Back to the Field* (Xiangwang de shenghuo, 2017-), *The Chinese Restaurant* (Zhong canting, 2017-), and *Friends Please Listen* (Pengyou qing ting hao, 2020-), are labelled as healing style shows and have received wide popularity. It is worth noticing that these popular variety shows were spread to China not directly from Japan but through Korea. It is widely recognized that these Chinese programs are based on imitations of some Korean variety shows, such as *Three Meals a Day* (삼시 세 끼) (2014-) and *Kang's Kitchen* (강식당) (2017-), which received a high volume of views on Chinese video sites after being added with Chinese subtitles. For example, *Kang's Kitchen* has now accumulated over 6 million views on *Bilibili.com*, a popular video site for young Chinese people.<sup>15</sup> Besides, the Chinese government's ban on South Korean entertainers has prevented Korean variety shows from being broadcast on Chinese TV stations,

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<sup>14</sup> *Douban.com*, a Chinese social networking service website that allows registered users to record information and create content related to film, books, music, recent events and so on.

<sup>15</sup> *Kang's Kitchen* on Bilibili: <https://b23.tv/dl9IGQ>.

which is one of the important reasons why there are so many imitations of Korean variety shows in China and they are gaining popularity locally. Beyond analyzing or comparing Japanese and Chinese healing style, tracing the transnational wave of it from Japan to neighboring countries is a much broader and more holistic perspective and it is probable that certain continuities or trends in regional development can be glimpsed through this process of cultural regionalization. However, this level of research may not be thoroughly explored in this master's thesis due to time and capacity constraints, so my research focuses on analyzing Chinese healing style media while using Japanese examples as references sometimes.

### **Effectiveness of Healing Style**

The popularity of healing style media shows its healing power, which can be stress-relieving, anxiety-relieving, warmth-conveying and so on. Some scholars have studied the effects of healing style media on users through questionnaires and other means. For example, in Huang and Jia's study on the positive effects of healing style anime, they collected 343 samples through questionnaires and concluded through data analysis that healing style anime has positive effects on adolescents in dimensions such as life attitudes, value orientations, sensitivity tendencies, and mindsets. The magnitude of the effect is related to the anime preference of the viewers. The positive effect of healing style anime is more pronounced for the group that likes healing style anime (Huang and Jia 74). This research shows that healing style anime can have a positive effect on users and their liking or identification with the anime is very crucial to achieve the positive effect.

Research on bibliotherapy also confirms that readers' identification and empathy with the

characters or situations in the story is critical to the therapeutic effect. The study by McKenna et al. interviewed eleven users of a bibliotherapy scheme and five referring practitioners to the scheme. They conducted a thematic analysis of the collected data, and one of the key findings is that users' "identifying with the literature on a personal level provided considerable assistance" (McKenna et al. 503). One of the pioneers of bibliotherapy, Laura J. Cohen, in her study of interviews with eight participants of bibliotherapy, emphasized how helpful it is for readers to be aware of their similarity to the protagonists of the story. "Once readers recognized themselves in characters in the reading material, they were able to experience other aspects of therapeutic reading and obtain help from it in their difficult life situations" (Cohen 77). Natalia Tukhareli presents in her article her first-hand experiences and research findings as a beneficiary and organizer of bibliotherapy projects. She also emphasizes the therapeutic effect that readers can achieve by connecting their personal experiences to the stories in the book. "By connecting to stories in the books and those shared by reading group members, individuals can not only rewrite their own narratives, but also live through situations that they may never have a chance to encounter in their lives. The latter can be especially beneficial for those who are trapped within life situations that they are not able to change (for example, individuals affected by a chronic illness or disability) or those dealing with stigmatization" (Natalia Tukhareli 87).

*The Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* defines bibliotherapy as the use of books selected on the basis of content in a planned reading program designed to facilitate the recovery of patients suffering from mental illness or emotional disturbance. "It has been

more than a century since the term bibliotherapy was introduced to describe the practice of using literary materials to address mental health issues. Currently, it is used as an umbrella term to cover a variety of clinical and non-clinical interventions involving books, reading and communication around texts” (Natalia Tukhareli 77). Although the definition of bibliotherapy includes designing specific book lists, reading and communicating etc. that is broader than simply getting healed by reading, one of the key factors in its effectiveness is the empathy between the reader and the characters or situations in the book, which is similar to the mechanism by which healing style fiction works on the reader. Therefore, I cite relevant research from bibliotherapy to provide support for the effectiveness of healing style literature.

### **How Different Media Present Healing**

Existing studies of various Japanese and Chinese healing style products and services, such as literature (Pan, 2017; Yan, 2017; D. Li, 2018; Yuko Ogawa, 2019), films (Wenbin Wang, 2019; Ren, 2020), anime (Fang, 2019), variety shows (X. Wang, 2018; Xia, 2020), cats café (Plourde, 2014; Robinson, 2019), and healing labor (Koch, 2016) are all about a particular product or service. There is no comparison of the similarities and differences in the way they present healing. Nonetheless, the approaches in their research for analyzing a particular healing style media are still informative when I analyze healing novels and anime separately in Chapters 3 and 4. For example, in her study of Japanese healing style anime, Fang Yinong summarized the characteristics of Japanese healing style anime in terms of plot, scenery, and other aspects. Her research inspires me to explore the characteristics of Chinese healing style anime from the perspective of natural landscape and color in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

In addition, the analysis of different media types in Paul Roquet's book on ambient media can be used as a reference for analyzing different healing style media. His book traces the emergence of mood-regulating media in Japan from the environmental art and Erik Satie<sup>16</sup> boom of the 1960s and 70s to the more recent emphasis on healing style. Although the scope of ambient media is narrower than healing style media, as Roquet claims, ambient media, alongside a wider range of relaxation-oriented art, music, photography, and video, are components of the healing boom (152), his study of different types of ambient media informs my analysis of the Chinese *zhiyu xi* novel, *Rushan, Gushu and me*, and the anime, *The Legend of Hei*.

### **Debates on Healing Style in Japan and China**

As Japanese healing style develops into a comprehensive cultural industry and gains considerable profits, it is inevitably subjected to a lot of criticism, most notably the criticism that enthusiasm for healing style products and services reflects the user's desire to escape reality. Paul Roquet argues that "healing incubation demands the emotional aperture opening onto the outside world be narrowed down" (169), meaning that healing style media provide individuals with comfort areas to avoid the threats of the outside world, but at the same time can intensify individuals' concerns and reactions to problems in the real world. Paul Roquet also cites many criticisms of healing style media by Japanese scholars, novelists and critics in his book to support this argument. For example, Asada Akira, a Japanese critic, sarcastically labelled postindustrial Japan as a society of infantile capitalism, in which ordinary people are content

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<sup>16</sup> Erik Satie (1866– 1925), a French composer, "his softer music played a pivotal role in establishing an audience for moods of comforting autonomy, priming listeners for the subsequent emergence of ambient music and other related genres including new age, 'healing' music, and the more atmospheric side of the 1980s world music boom" (Roquet 38-9).

to not question those in power as long as their comfortable surroundings and personal pleasures continue to be provided (Asada Akira 275). Haruki Murakami, the most famous Japanese healing style writer, was chastised by Japanese novelist Ōe Kenzaburō who claimed that Haruki Murakami doesn't take an active attitude toward society, or even toward the immediate environments of daily life. This criticism is not directed at Haruki Murakami or his books but the healing style, as such criticism also surrounds other healing style writers. Literary critic Kuroko Kazuo, in an article critiquing the healing boom, cited well-known female healing style writer Banana Yoshimoto's description of how sometimes, when she was feeling bad, simply eating a piece of cake is all that was necessary for her to turn her feelings around and be happy for the rest of the day. Kuroko pointed to this therapeutic use of food as an example of Banana Yoshimoto's apathy toward wider social struggles. According to Paul Roquet, these critics regard healing style media as a solipsistic practice, a way of exploiting immediate pleasant effects to block out and ignore the more threatening and intractable aspects of social and political reality (Roquet 169-170).

A similar discourse has emerged in China as well. Wenbin Wang asserted that "Chinese healing style is in danger of degenerating into a narrow individualism of narcissism, self-pity, and self-comfort. From this perspective, the core of Chinese healing style is actually a private compromise that abandons social collective demands" (116). While recognizing that the Chinese healing style has become a means of spiritual solace for young people in the face of difficult realities, Wenbin Wang raises these questions about healing style. Briefly, the comfort created by the healing style media can easily be used by many individuals as a tool to escape

from difficulties of reality. The popularity of the healing style media contributes to this attitude of not responding to real-life problems, that is, the abandonment of collective demands. Another Chinese scholar, Zeng Yuli, similarly raises the issue of the so-called healing that healing style media offers is a kind of escape from problems. In his study of Chinese healing style, he critically interpreted the books of a popular Chinese healing style writer named Anthony. Zeng Yuli argues that Anthony could heal his readers to a certain extent, but this healing does not identify the source of sorrow within the specific social structure, life experience, and power relations. Instead, it is an active indulgence in sorrow. The most characteristic feature of the healing style represented by Anthony is childishness, which is a kind of total isolation from responsibility by hiding in a child's world. This kind of healing is, by its very nature, a kind of radical escape (Zeng 100). The above criticisms of the healing style by scholars, literary scholars, and critics in Japan and China show that the questioning of the healing style points to its indifference to the plight of the broader social or political context and its indulgence in the illusion of comfort created for the individual to escape reality. After observing so much criticism, it is hard not to question whether healing style and its general consumers are indeed so passive and escapist. If that is the case, then how can we explain the popularity of the healing style from the 1990s to the present day? Why has it not disappeared or been replaced?

In this thesis, I argue that not all healing style media are just creating the illusion of a paradise, there are still many healing style media that try to respond to the problems Chinese people encounter. This literature review provides a comprehensive interpretation of healing in

Japan and China as a basis for further research. The first two sections not only integrate when and how healing style emerged in Japan and China but also explain the reasons why it was able to spread from Japan to China from a new cultural regionalization perspective. However, this does not mean that the healing style of these two countries are the same thing. The third part draws on theories of world literature to explain the differences in the media forms of Chinese and Japanese healing style. In the fourth section, current scholarships and the theories of bibliotherapy are drawn upon to provide a reasonable theoretical basis for the effectiveness of healing style. Moreover, a review of previous researchers' studies on how different healing style media present healing informs this thesis's analysis of two different media forms of healing style. Finally, this chapter analyzes criticisms of the healing style in China and Japan and proposes an opposing viewpoint, highlighting that not all healing style media are just creating illusions for people to indulge in to escape reality. The next chapters 3 and 4 will examine how healing novels and anime, respectively, respond positively to the real-life crises faced by most Chinese people.

### Chapter 3 Addressing the Relationship Crisis in *Rushan, Gushu and Me*

Based on the aforementioned widespread criticism that the healing style's commitment to the illusion of relaxing comfort can lead to avoidance of solving stress-inducing problems, I counter these criticisms in this and the next chapter with examples of two types of healing style media. In this chapter, I use the novel *Rushan, Gushu and Me* by Chinese author Su Hei (1969-) as an example to answer two questions: first, does *Rushan Gushu and Me* just build a comfortable illusion? Second, what elements are used in healing style novels to present healing. I argue first that this novel serves as a good example of how Chinese healing style literature is not building an illusion of comfort but actively responding to the problems that people encounter by identifying that the emotional relationship crisis facing Chinese people today is the central concern of this novel. The novel responds to the collective problems by presenting representative cases of emotional crises and offering patterned step-by-step solutions that integrate practical psychotherapeutic knowledge. Secondly, in the presentation of the healing power in this novel, some typical healing elements like the resonant protagonists and the richness of the sensory depictions play crucial roles in facilitating the healing of the protagonists and inspiring readers. At the same time, I point out its shortcomings in the use of healing elements.

*Rushan, Gushu and Me* was published by Tianjin renmin chubanshe 天津人民出版社 in 2017. The 288-page novel tells stories of healing mental and physical pain. Firstly, this novel is representative in its use of healing elements. Although healing style novels that incorporate psychotherapeutic knowledge are different from the "chicken soup for the soul" that appeared

earlier and flooded the Chinese book market, they share some typical uses of healing elements that make this novel representative of almost all healing style novels in this respect. The use of healing elements will be analyzed in detail in the second half of this chapter. Secondly, *Rushan, Gushu and Me* presents diverse cases of emotional crisis. The main characters Asagi and Gushu heal each other's emotional crises and after that, they establish a healing studio together where they heal many people. Such a story structure provides sufficient space for a detailed presentation of many typical cases of emotional crisis, such as lack of fatherly or motherly love, betrayal by husband and always being hurt in an intimate relationship. This advantage makes the novel more representative than other single-case books. Thirdly, the author is a professional and experienced psychological counselor, which guarantees the typicality of the cases in the story and the professionalism of the psychotherapeutic knowledge. The author, Su Hei, was born before China's economic take-off and grew up with the country's economic rise, which allows her to have first-hand experience and understanding of the collective emotional crisis faced by Chinese people in post-industrial society. In addition to being a writer, she is also a famous psychotherapist, which provides the premise and foundation for incorporating psychotherapy theory and abundant real-life cases<sup>17</sup> into the story. Finally, as the Introduction chapter illustrates, this author's books have sold millions of copies and her scores on reader rating sites remain stable.

In this chapter, I first analyze in detail the focus on relationship crises and the practical therapeutic steps that integrate knowledge of psychotherapy, or in other words, the healing

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<sup>17</sup> The cases of healing in this novel are not purely fictional but are based on a number of cases. The author, Su Hei, as a professional psychotherapist, does not reveal where the real cases came from, but she confesses in the preface to the novel that "she is putting the pain she knows and has experienced to rest in the form of a novel" (*Rushan, Gushu and Me 2*).

process of the healee<sup>18</sup> in this novel. Secondly, I examine in detail how some typical healing elements like the protagonist settings and sensory descriptions present healing and the inadequacy of the presentation.

### ***Rushan Gushu and Me's Response to Emotional Relationship Crisis***

#### ***The Establishment of Asagi & Tree Studio***

*Rushan, Gushu and Me* focuses on the emotional relationship crisis experienced by most people in contemporary China in an environment of material abundance but spiritual deprivation. Rapidly developing China lingers in an atmosphere where people are expected to work like machines to support the rapid functioning of society. As a result, many people are busy with work but emotionally deprived. The characters in the novel are like many people in China. They have relatively good financial situations but face terrible relationships with their families or loved ones that even cause serious psychological difficulties. Asagi & Tree Studio is an emotional healing studio established by the protagonists Asagi and Gushu. The plot of this novel revolves around the resolution of all the characters' emotional relationship crises. In the story, the relationship between Asagi and her mother is like that of strangers, and Asagi and her ex-boyfriend, Rushan, break up because of Rushan's deception and infidelity. These crises make the kind and strong Asagi feel deeply hurt and fall into self-doubt. She decides to leave to start a new life in a completely new place, Iceland, where she meets Gushu, who accompanies Asagi as she deals with the deaths of her mother and Rushan. After that, she realizes that she was overly dependent on Rushan's fatherly love and was subconsciously trying

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<sup>18</sup> The definition of the term healee from [Collins English Dictionary](#) is a person who is being healed. I use this word to refer to the characters who recover or get some relief from their emotional difficulties with the help of healers in healing style novels.

to make up for the lack of love from her own parents. Since then, Asagi and Gushu have been running a spiritual therapy studio, named Asagi & Tree Studio (the combination of their names) together, helping many people to understand the root cause of their emotional crisis and try to heal the physical and psychological damage step by step. There is a clear division of labor between Asagi and Gushu in their work. Asagi is a professional psychologist and has the ability to see red marks on people's bodies that suggest the root cause of their physical and mental suffering, so she is in charge of discovering the root cause of the healee's physical and mental suffering and leading them to heal. Gushu is responsible for redesigning the hair and makeup of the healee and helping them to purify their minds and bodies by brewing tea that fits their state of mind.

The second and third chapters of the novel tell stories of the healees Angel and Lucy, respectively, two women who are physically and emotionally tormented, ostensibly by marriage and love, seeking healing at Asagi & Tree Studio. Although Angel and Lucy's experiences are completely different and there is no fixed pattern in the author's narrative, there are still some regular steps integrated with rich knowledge of psychotherapy in the healing process which play an important role in the healees' recovery. In the following section, I will demonstrate in detail some of the relationship crises and patterned resolution steps through several cases in *Rushan, Gushu and Me* to reinforce one of the main arguments that Chinese healing style novel is actively providing solutions to the dilemmas people encounter.

### ***The Four Patterned Healing Steps Integrating Knowledge of Psychotherapy***

I distill the healing process of the healees in the novel into the following four main steps,

from which we can see how the author carefully designs practical and referenceable templates of healing stories that incorporate psychotherapeutic knowledge in response to the emotional relationship crisis most Chinese people experience today.

*Step 1: Establishing Comfortable Environment and Calm Mood*

Asagi & Tree Studio is located in a beautiful seaside location with large floor-to-ceiling glass windows and a tea house filled with flowers. Asagi receives the healee in a well-lit room, seating them on a very soft beige single sofa. She prepares a plush cushion for Angel and a green cushion embroidered with a small forest for Lucy. Both of them instinctively hug the cushion placed on the sofa in their arms. “‘Wow, what a great cushion!’ Angel couldn’t help but praise, forgetting that she had come with a burdened mind” (11). This is one of Asagi’s areas of expertise: the ability to predict the psychological state of the healee through the information they submit before the meeting, to determine what will make them feel comfortable and protected, and only in such an environment can the healee feel safe and willing to open their heart and reveal their hidden thoughts and needs.

Once the healee is seated, Asagi begins by tapping a small black singing bowl and asking the healee to close their eyes and listen (11). The Japanese design of the inward-facing mouth of the singing bowl allows it to produce an unusually focused, introspective, clear and bright sound with a long echo that cleanses the soul and calms the mind. This is the meditation step designed by Asagi: the sound of the bowl is used to calm the healee as they arrive, helping them to reclaim their scattered energies and prepare for stabilizing their thoughts and clearing their minds.

The singing bowl was first used as a powerful meditation tool by practitioners in Nepal in the 600s BCE. It is played with the mouth of the bowl facing upwards, fixed by a cloth ring or held in place by the player's left hand, while the right hand holds a short wooden stick and strikes the wall of the bowl to produce a crisp, bright, pleasant and melodious sound, like the sound of a copper bell, with a long and penetrating duration. It is said that when a singing bowl is played, the body and mind are quickly absorbed. The brain is emptied, and a stable and peaceful state is entered. The singing bowl is now commonly used in Chinese and Japanese temples as a practice tool. There are many healing style music pieces played with singing bowls that can be found on the internet that are used to relax and purify the mind.<sup>19</sup> Figure 6 is a singing bowl produced under the supervision of Su Hei and available for sale online. From this, we can see the author's attempt to have the reader practice the healing steps in the story, which confirms the argument that the healing style responds actively to people's emotional relationship crises. In summary, whether it is a bright and spacious environment, comfortable sofa and cushions or the sound of singing bowl, although in various forms, they all appear with the purpose of establishing a comfortable environment and a calm mood. This is the essence of the first step: establishing a comfortable healing environment and a calm mood ready to receive treatment. Such a comfortable and calm beginning step, repeated in several cases of emotional crisis healing in the story, helps build trust between the healer and healee and provides a good foundation for the later steps.

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<sup>19</sup> Link to the sound of the singing bowls: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nL7XROw71FI>.

Figure 6 Singing Bowl (Tongqing/Songbo 铜磬/颂钵)



Source: <https://shop.fairys.co/products/xsuhei-singingbowl>

### *Step 2: Collected Information as a Clue*

In an environment where the healee feels safe and comfortable, Asagi and the healee move on to the next part of the healing process. Depending on the personal information collected from the healee before the meeting, Asagi uses her supernatural ability to see the red pain points in people's bodies to try to ask the healee questions that will lead them to discover the root of their problems and to confront the truth.

The information collected before the meeting comes from an information form filled out by the healee, which has four main questions: 1. The Cause of the Pain; 2. Your Reaction; 3. How the Experience Affected You; 4. The Reason for Seeking Healing. Before each healee arrives at Asagi & Tree Studio, they all somehow think their current predicament is insurmountable. Both Angel and Lucy express their confusion in the current situation described in the Reasons for Seeking Healing column of their personal information form. Angel writes, "I just want to find someone objective and professional to tell me why my situation is so horrible. Is it really my own fault? Are other people not to blame? Shouldn't they get paid for what they did?" (14). Lucy writes: "I feel very troubled. ... How I wish I had never had the

stigma of my past. I am so regretful” (35). However, in fact, their life dilemmas are not as insurmountable as they believe. It is worth noting that under the column of the first question, The Cause of the Pain, the healee fills in is always what they think it is, but withholds the whole truth. For example, Angel writes an emotional paragraph about how ridiculous and upsetting it is for her husband to leave her. When she is asked by Asagi at the beginning of their first meeting if she has anything to add to this information form, she repeats her resentment toward her husband and mother for fifteen minutes until Asagi politely stops her by leading her into the next step of the healing process (15). It was not until a late stage of the healing process that Angel realizes that it is not merely her mother’s and husband’s faults that cause the present situation, but more directly her own viciousness (23). Similarly, under the column of Cause of the Pain, Lucy describes how her ex-boyfriend hurt her over and over again (33). It was after Asagi’s guidance that she understands that it is herself who gave others the opportunity to hurt her (40). These examples show that getting into seemingly insoluble dilemmas is often due to a lack of comprehensive knowledge of the facts. The takeaway from the healing novels is that actively seeking outside help - talking to someone with experience or a professional counselor, such as Asagi, to see their situation and problems from new perspectives and thus gain a more comprehensive understanding of the facts - is one way to resolve the dilemma. The practicality of the second step is to reassess and clarify the causes of the emotional crisis, the reactions of the healee, the effects of the crisis and the expected solutions through the four questions in the information form to get a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the crisis. This step is worth learning because only with a clear understanding of the crisis will the healee not

get confused and identify their current problem as unsolvable.

### *Step 3: Counseling-style Q&A*

By filling out these four questions on the information form, the healee has begun their healing process even before meeting with the healer. On the one hand, answering these four questions helps them sort out their thoughts and understand their situations. On the other hand, as for the healer, the information is very helpful as a clue to discovering the root of the hurt step by step. This is a difficult but important process. In the novel, Asagi uses her psychic power (the ability to see red marks on people's bodies that suggest the root cause of their physical and mental suffering) to explore the root cause of the healee's pain. Then Asagi guides the healee to find root causes and solutions by asking them questions. This process also requires professional psychotherapy theories. For example, the conversation between Asagi and the healee is like a question-and-answer session between the counselor and the patient. The following elaborates on this counseling-style Q&A session using the case of Lucy and Angel in the novel.

Through asking questions, Asagi makes Lucy aware of facts that have been overlooked or deliberately concealed, thus helping Lucy get to the root of the crisis, which is a prerequisite for finding solutions. Pages 38-41 of the novel detail how Lucy discovers what causes her to be physically and emotionally hurt in love through Asagi's questions and instructions. First, Lucy follows Asagi's instruction to give herself the message of love. At this point her uterus suddenly becomes very uncomfortable. She recalls her nightmare, in which there were many babies and blood and she heard someone calling out for mother. Asagi quickly identifies the

crux of the problem and asks a leading question. “Babies can’t speak. Can you recognize whose voice is calling mommy?” (39).<sup>20</sup> Lucy is shocked to realize that it is her own voice calling for her mother. Lucy feels shocked because she is completely unaware of this fact and thus cannot rely on herself to discover the root of the pain. Asagi immediately observes Lucy’s expression and asks another important question that helps Lucy realize that the root cause of her constant frustration in relationships can be traced back to the lack of maternal love. “I see a secret you’ve been suppressing for years. Would you like to tell me?” (39). With Asagi’s vast experience she could guess what the root cause probably is. However, she does not forcefully confirm with Lucy whether her idea is correct or not. Instead, she guides Lucy to think so that Lucy herself can analyze the logic of the causality. The findings drawn by the healee herself are more convincing than what the healer tells her. After calming down, Lucy confesses the secret she has been hiding for twenty years - she is an outcast, so she always feels unwanted and unloved. The pain in her uterus evokes a deep desire to be affirmed by her mother, which is the love she wants most, not the love she always thinks come from her ex-boyfriend, who was a playboy. She forgives his betrayal over and over again because she wants to be the last woman for him as a way to prove that she is worthy of being loved. This explains why she gets hurt all the time. Above is how Lucy has a fuller picture of her predicament in a counseling-style Q&A session with Asagi. In this process, it is crucial for the healer to detect facts that are overlooked by the healee and to observe the healee’s reactions in order to ask guiding questions, which all require knowledge of psychotherapy.

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<sup>20</sup> Unless specified, all translations from Chinese to English were conducted by the author.

Lucy is not just a special case in the novel; such examples are common in real life. Niu, an expert at the Shanghai Mental Health Center who has been engaged in clinical psychotherapy for more than ten years said in an interview, “When an individual’s inner emotions are not satisfied and released, they present themselves through physical reactions such as internet addiction, physical pain, and parent-child estrangement. It happens to almost everyone. It’s just a lack of self-direction in certain individuals that leads to solidified behavioral or physical reactions that become distressing” (Wu 27). Lucy is one such person and Asagi for Lucy is playing such a role in helping her refine her self-perception and emotional detachment. Many people in real life need more or less the same kind of support from Asagi, but not everyone has access to it. Reading healing style novels to see how the protagonist solves his or her dilemma can give the reader some insights about how to seek help like the main character. Such an application can be found in the reader comments. A reader on *Douban* commented under this novel, “This book got me really interested in relationships and psychology. Su Hei has a really good grasp on the details. There is something to be learned from the emotional healing in the novel.”<sup>21</sup> This reader comment shows that reading this novel is helpful for her or him in solving real-life problems. First of all, the reader “learns” something from the way the main character resolves their emotional crises in the story. In addition, the fact that the main character actively seeks psychotherapy to get healing also stimulates the reader’s interest in psychology, which is the first step towards solving the problem.

In addition, this principle of reading fiction to solve real-life dilemmas is similar to that

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<sup>21</sup> Link to this comment: <https://book.douban.com/comment/2395729454>.

of bibliotherapy and its effectiveness has been supported by many researchers. The study by McKenna et al. presented in the literature review shows that “unexpected connections were made with the literature enabling participants to recognize symptoms, actions and experiences from a different perspective...For most, this recognition facilitated adjustment to their condition and the subsequent adaptation of strategies to manage distress...The idea of identifying with the literature was also highlighted by one general practitioner who reported that patients found this aspect to be particularly noteworthy, and it was considered conducive to positive treatment outcomes” (McKenna et al. 503). In conjunction with another reader’s comment, “after reading *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, I feel like I’m going through my 30 years of sorrow and happiness all over again. Some of it made sense. Some of it is clearer. And some of it seems to be unfinished.”<sup>22</sup> What the reader experiences as if living his or her own life all over again is very similar to what bibliotherapy offers in terms of connecting with literature to enable participants to see themselves in a different way. There is a reader who also commented, “if I could open it (*Rushan, Gushu and Me*) earlier, maybe everything in my life would be different. What I thought was love was not love, but my own desire to perform. Learn to accept, accompany and embrace.”<sup>23</sup> It is not known exactly which case in the book this reader drew inspiration from, but what she or he has learned about acceptance, companionship and tolerance suggests that reading *Rushan, Gushu and Me* did facilitate her or his “adjustment”. In this sense, reading healing style novels has the potential to achieve healing effects similar to those of bibliotherapy.

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<sup>22</sup> Link to the comment: <https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch?uri=/book/27092394/interest/1242246045>.

<sup>23</sup> Link to the comment: <https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch?uri=/book/27092394/interest/1418846163>.

Compared to Lucy's case, Angel's case is even trickier. While they both want to cover up some secrets and lack a comprehensive perception of their situations, the difference between them is that Lucy is the victim while Angel is not only the victim but also the perpetrator. Angel is blind to her own viciousness and keeps blaming others, which makes her Q&A session more intractable. Thus, Asagi does more than just basic observation and guidance but proactive facilitation. This process requires extensive theoretical and practical experience in counseling; otherwise, it is easy to make the healee uncooperative. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Asagi is not always serious and asks questions. She is a mirror of her healees, objective, friendly and trustworthy to them.

After Angel continues to complain about her husband and mother for 15 minutes, Asagi politely interrupts her and asks. "What else have you not told me?" (15). Angel denies for the first time but Asagi notices some details of Angel's physical reaction: her pupils dilate slightly and her voice becomes hoarse. Such body language is usually due to the fear of saying something that one does not want others to know, so Asagi further asks, "I see that you should have a past event that you did not write about. Please don't mind if I ask you directly" (16). Angel still does not admit to hiding anything and looks confident that she can answer Asagi's next questions. These two denials show that this kind of Q&A session is not so easy to conduct, as it requires the professional competence of the healer as a guarantee.

In dealing with Angel's concealment, Asagi plays a different role than in Lucy's case, where she is guiding Lucy to take the initiative. Asagi switches to a more straightforward approach with Angel. Firstly, instead of following up with a new question, Asagi stares straight

at Angel and remains silent for thirty seconds. On the one hand, Asagi is taking the initiative in the conversation by controlling the pace, which is necessary when facing a more complex case. On the other hand, a well-timed pause can help evoke the hidden secrets in Angel's subconscious. Then Asagi asks, "Your younger brother didn't die in a traffic accident, did he?" (16). Angel immediately falls into surprise and struggles. After observing Angel's reaction, Asagi does not force Angel to answer but walks up behind her and places her warm hands on her shoulders in a gentler than feather manner. With the professional help of Asagi, Angel faces her own malicious nature that she has been hiding, which is a prerequisite for trying to get to the root of the problem.

This technique of leading or facilitating the healee to tell the ignored or deliberately concealed facts through physical and psychological suggestions and questioning after gaining the trust of the healee is used in every healing story in the novel. This approach is effective in helping the healee get out of their dilemma. In this process, the professional skills of the healer play an important role. These psychotherapy theories and practices can be integrated into the plot benefit from the author being a counselor, who has a wealth of theoretical and practical experience. This ensures that the plot of the novel is not overly dramatic and that the reader is able to learn theories and methods of emotional regulation while reading the novel, from which we can see both the efforts of the healing style writer to provide solutions to emotional relationship crises and the reader's practice of the methods of healing in the novel. The practicality of this counseling-style question-and-answer session is that it not only provides readers with similar experiences to the protagonist with references to solutions but also inspires

readers with other emotional relationship crises to actively seek help from counselors or other experienced people to uncover the hidden root causes of the crisis, just like the protagonist.

Su Hei, the author of this novel, writes many stories about how the physical or psychological pain of the healee actually hides a deeper cause, as analyzed in Angel's and Lucy's cases where Asagi asked them about their hidden secrets. The process of uncovering secrets or unraveling scars is not only difficult, but it is also brutal and it can easily cause some damage to the healee, such as being overwhelmed by the inability to face themselves. This is definitely not the desired outcome of this type of healing. The next step is where Gushu comes into play. The next section analyzes how Gushu uses a series of rituals to offer the healee the courage and confidence necessary to let go of the past and begin afresh.

#### *Step 4: Rituals Empowering Confidence and Courage to Start over*

After Angel confesses her cruelty and writes letters of confession to her family in the meditation room, Gushu takes her to the styling room where he washes and cuts Angel's hair, treats her skin and applies light makeup. When she slowly opens her eyes, she seems to be a different person. The long hair that she tied up casually is now shorter, revealing the contours of her face. She just realizes that her face now looked like this. She has not carefully looked in the mirror or done her own makeup in far too long. Looking at her new self in the mirror, her face looks ten years younger than before. In this step, Gushu creates a new makeup and hairstyle for Angel that is completely different from what she had before. This is more than changes of appearance but gives Angel a strong psychological suggestion that she can get rid of the evil self of the past to be a different and better version of herself.

Gushu then brews her a unique “transformation tea” called Far Voice. When Angel drinks it, she senses the light fragrance of bamboo, which makes her feel like she is in a sea of bamboo and her whole body is being cleansed. This step shows how Angel feels as if her body is also purified in some way after drinking the customized transformation tea given by Gushu. This so-called purification is also a positive psychological suggestion, which helps Angel reconcile with her tainted past.

After Asagi dug out Angel’s secret in the previous third step, Angel had to face her evil self, which was cruel and hard for Angel to accept. To help Angel overcome this final hurdle, in this fourth step of healing, Gushu uses the healing power of styling and tea to give Angel the confidence and courage to start anew. This is a step no less important and necessary than the previous ones. The new hair and makeup look and the tea that can help with the transformation are essentially positive psychological suggestions for the healee to bid farewell to the past and start a new life. These methods are effective to a certain extent and easy to practice.

This section starts with an introduction to the establishment and operation of Asagi & Tree Studio and analyzes the four patterned steps of therapy in this studio through the cases of Lucy and Angel. The author, Su Hei does not emphasize the steps and the role of each step in the novel, but the four steps that I extracted from the cases in the story integrate extensive psychotherapeutic techniques and play an important role in the healee’s healing process. These healing approaches are practiced by some readers and have the potential to be widely used in professional or self-directed mental regulation. The first step, the establishment of a

comfortable environment and a calm mood, shows some ways to build trust between the interlocutors and to get the conversation started in a pleasant way. The second step of filling in personal information helps to sort out the healees' own situation and reflect on cognitive deficiencies. The author also appends blank information forms for the reader to use. The third counseling-style Q&A session requires the healer to have extensive theoretical and practical experience in psychotherapy, which plays a crucial role in helping the healees discover the root cause of their sufferings. The various rituals in the last step are necessary for the healees to build the courage and confidence to reconcile with the past and start anew. In short, these four patterned steps, which incorporate psychotherapeutic knowledge, are intertwined to support the entire healing process. The reliability and practicality of these healing experiences and methods in the novel exhibit the concern and positive response of Chinese healing style literature to people's emotional relationship crises and reinforce the argument that they are not just creating illusions of temporary comfort and they are not escaping from solving problems.

### **Healing Elements of Chinese Healing Style Literature**

Regarding the second research question, what elements are used in healing style novels to present healing, along with the above analyses of psychotherapy techniques in the healing process, the novel's resonant protagonists and sensory descriptions of hearing, sight, and taste all play key roles. This section elaborates on how the novel uses these elements to present healing and the shortcomings in the presentation.

#### ***Resonant Protagonists***

From the occupations of the novel's protagonists, the social contexts in which the stories

take place and the main conflict, we can see that this novel has some typical characteristics of healing style novels. The first is the presence of protagonists who are able to arouse great resonance with the reader. The protagonists of healing style novels live in the same social context in which the healing style emerged. They are always ordinary students or office workers. Regardless of their financial situation, they all face a relationship crisis, which constitutes the main conflicts in the plots. The protagonists of the novels are like the epitome of the general consumers who drive the healing boom, and such characteristics are shared by almost all protagonists of healing style novels, including both Chinese and Japanese novels.

Many of the books by the representative writers of Japanese healing literature, Haruki Murakami (1949-), Banana Yoshimoto (1964-), Nanae Aoyama (1983-), and Ito Ogawa (1973-), focus on the spiritual dilemmas of Japan's urban young people and try to propose solutions to their situations so that readers can gain inspiration from the stories. In Haruki Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, the main character, 36-year-old Tsukuru Tazaki, is a railroad engineer living in Tokyo, Japan in the late 1990s. The main conflict of this storyline is the emotional entanglement between Tsukuru Tazaki and his friends. *A Perfect Day to Be Alone (Hitori biyori)* written by Nanae Aoyama depicts a 20-year-old odd-job girl, Mita Chizu, who lives with a 70-year-old relative in Tokyo around the early 2000s. The story revolves around the life of young Mita Chizu and her elderly relatives and their respective emotional lives. Young people like Mita Chizu, flitting between temporary jobs, are called *furitā* in Japan. According to the Cabinet Office, the number of *furitā* increased from 1.8 million in 1991 to 4.2 million in 2002, which undeniably reflects that many Japanese people

in this period lived in uncertainty about the future.<sup>24</sup> After winning the 136th Akutagawa Prize in 2007 for this novel, the author, Nanae Aoyama, said that she hopes her books can encourage these people to take the first step bravely.

Chinese healing style novels share these characteristics. For example, in *A Journey, through Time, with Anthony* by Chinese author Anthony, he records the fragments of his life and some insights into life from college to work, from home to abroad, in the voice of an ordinary boy. In *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, Rushan is a cardiologist. Gushu runs a barber shop. The character in the title, “Me” refers to Asagi<sup>25</sup> who is a psychologist. They all live in present-day China. The story revolves around the emotional entanglement among them. There are countless such examples not to be listed here. In a word, all of the above-mentioned healing style books share the characteristic that the protagonists epitomize the lives of the consumers who are driving the healing boom, which makes it easier to generate empathy between the readers and the protagonists, thus allowing the reader to immerse themselves in the protagonist’s healing process and be inspired by their story. A number of readers’ comments confirm the empathy that this novel generates. “What impresses me most is not the ripples it brings to my inner world nor the interpretation and soothing of relationships but the resonance of my own emotions.”<sup>26</sup> “It’s not like reading a book but more like participating in a life experience.”<sup>27</sup> Since the protagonists of this novel, the social context in which they live and the emotional crises they face all have the feature of arousing resonance with readers, it is easy

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<sup>24</sup> Naikakufu. *Heisei 15-nen han kokumin seikatsu hakusho* (White paper on national life 2003). Tōkyō: Gyosei, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Asagi is the character’s first name derived from her father’s surname who is Japanese. Asagi’s last name is Yuan taken from her mother’s surname who is Chinese.

<sup>26</sup> Link to this comment: <https://book.douban.com/review/8826690>.

<sup>27</sup> Link to this comment: <https://m.douban.com/book/comment/1229400332>.

for the readers to see themselves in the story and experience a sense of participation, thus achieving healing effects.

Much of the research in bibliotherapy can also support the effectiveness of such healing effects in the sense that the typical technique of healing style novels in which the reader and the protagonist establish good empathy and thus achieve healing is identical to the principle by which bibliotherapy works. Laura J. Cohen's interviews with eight bibliotherapy participants confirm that almost all participants acknowledged that identification with the characters or situations in the book is crucial to experiencing the positive effects of stress reduction (Cohen 81). McKenna et al.'s study of bibliotherapy mentioned in the literature review also reveals that identification with literature is an important factor in facilitating change. "Service users found that identifying with the literature on a personal level provided considerable assistance" (McKenna et al. 503). It is clear that creating resonance is the key to how bibliotherapy and healing style novels work with readers, which also explains why Japanese and Chinese healing style literature shares the feature of resonant protagonists.

### ***Auditory Elements***

Various instruments and songs are described in *Rushan, Gushu and Me*. Their appearance is not merely for entertainment, but an important way to bring the protagonists into a specific emotion and atmosphere, and thus, facilitate their healing.

One of the instruments analyzed above, the singing bowl is used at the beginning of Asagi & Tree Studio's healing process because its crisp sound can focus the distracted mind, its pleasant tone relaxes the nervous mind, and its long echo is calming. The singing bowl is used

by Asagi as a prelude to the more difficult counseling-style question-and-answer sessions. Besides, this novel describes another instrument in detail, the *shakuhachi*, which is often used close to the end of the healing process. This is because its thick and low sound gives a steady and continuous strength. The smooth rhythm of *shakuhachi* songs can also calm the mind of the healee whose emotions have been stirred up during the previous counseling-style Q&A sessions. For example, Angel's confession in the meditation room is accompanied by a very quiet, low *shakuhachi* monophonic (26), which allows her to relax into contemplation.

In addition to the instruments described above and their unique sound effects, Asagi and Gushu select particular songs for everyone who comes to their studio seeking healing. When Angle is ready to clear her mind and start over, the *Chopin Ballade* (28) is played to make her feel relieved and full of hope and excitement for the future. When Lisa Ono's jazzy voice with a little magnetic and lazy flavor permeates the styling room, Lucy remembers the days where her mother played Lisa Ono's *Pretty World* album all day long. Specific songs for many people have the magic of awakening memories and reshaping moods. Ono's songs make Lucy as relaxed and cheerful as if she is back in her teenage years. She sits at the full dressing table, ready to welcome a new self.

Each instrument and song in *Rushan, Gushu and Me* has its own unique story and experience. They are the soundtrack for the reader to follow the protagonist on his or her healing journey and they infect the atmosphere of a particular episode and create the images of the story's scenes. The author of the novel, Su Hei even released a music album of the same name for the book. She wrote in the preface, "May the enigmatic power of music lead you to

explore the emotional state of the characters and experience their wounds and love” (5). The audio of the album can be found on YouTube.<sup>28</sup> A user on *Douban* commented on this novel, “The *Shakuhachi* music is fantastic. Reading this book with the album to listen to it, I quickly get into the picture.”<sup>29</sup> It shows that the music can help the reader understand the healing in this novel.

### ***Visual Elements***

In addition to the aforementioned music, the fresh and quiet scenes in healing novels also play an important role in presenting healing. Specific scenes can have an effect on the protagonists’ mental state or emotions, and thus, forward their recovery process. In *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, there are many special scenes containing specific landscapes, sounds, smells, or even religious objects, all of which play a certain role in the healing. For example, when Asagi first comes to Gushu’s barbershop in Iceland, many Zen<sup>30</sup> and vibrant scenes amaze her and refresh her mood. She sees a fully transparent gazebo and through its glass, she could see a few dead trees and a large snowfield. Such a scene is like a little meditation paradise (65). In contrast to the silent exterior of Iceland, the interior of the barbershop is lively and interesting. “The gazebo resembles a small forest full of green plants and colorful flowers. A base for scented candles is placed on the floor. Next to it is a small Japanese mizutaki cave installation. Water flows into a black tiled jar with a bamboo pipe, making a murmuring sound” (66). It is

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<sup>28</sup> The names and links of the five songs are as follows:

1. *Profound Solitude* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udTOMnVrZqU>
2. *Together In The Dark* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqF-w5XstS4>
3. *Lunar Fate* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzpskXQF49E>
4. *Sanya* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8CHwUz6a7A>
5. *Tamuke* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Uk2AUj-A8>

<sup>29</sup> Link to this comment: <https://book.douban.com/comment/2935917826>.

<sup>30</sup> The word Zen in this context refers to *chanyi* 禅意 in Chinese, a state of mind that is clear, calm and free from the distractions of the mundane world and desires.

a scene that naturally makes Asagi, who has Japanese ancestry and comes to Iceland to heal her emotional trauma but is a bit uncomfortable with the cold wind and atmosphere of Iceland, feel intimate, relaxed, safe and trusting, which becomes a perfect start to Asagi's healing journey in Iceland. Besides, religion can influence people's psychological situation and view of the world, and can even affect the human body by influencing the human brain to release hormones and neurotransmitters, so it has a certain healing function in itself. The healing style author also makes good use of this point, intentionally or unintentionally, to make greater use of the healing effect of their works.

### ***Gustatory Elements***

The above analyses show that both music and scene descriptions play a role in creating a specific atmosphere or driving the storyline and so moving the healees' healing process ahead. Is this also true of taste depictions? While people's receptivity to music and images that convey information about atmosphere and mood is largely limited by the experience and taste of the perceiver, food gives a more immediate and multifaceted sensation, especially in a specific cultural context. This is an important reason why various healing style media often depict the look, smell, taste, and cultural connotation of delicious food to stimulate the senses of the protagonist and the reader. One representative example of using the healing power of food is the novel, *Kitchen* by Japanese healing style author Banana Yoshimoto. *Kitchen* tells the story of Mikage, a young Japanese girl. When she is struggling with the loss of her last relative, her grandmother, she is invited to move in with Yuichi, a friend of her grandmother. With the help of Yuichi and his transgender mother, Eriko, Mikage gradually returns to a normal life. As the

novel's title, *Kitchen*, implies, food plays an important role in Mikage's healing process. For example, in the following passage, there is a combination of the tactile stimulation of the wind, the visual stimulation of the view outside the window, and the description of the delicious food and the protagonists' reactions to eating them.

Looking out the window as the evening wind came through the screen door, a remnant of pale blue stretching over the hot sky, we ate boiled pork, cold Chinese noodles, cucumber salad. I cooked for them: she who made a fuss over everything I did; he who ate vast quantities in silence (Yoshimoto 57).

The summer breeze and the blue sky outside the window are certainly relaxing, but the delicious food is what punctuates the passage. Mikage cooks for Yuichi and Eriko. No matter what kind of food Mikage cooks, Eriko fusses and praises it, and Yuichi keeps swallowing it. Their behavior is not only an acceptance of Mikage's food but also implies Yuichi and Eriko's approval of Mikage as a new family member. This is an important reason why Mikage is able to gain a sense of belonging in Yuichi's house and gradually get over the loss of relatives.

Chinese healing style media, similar to their Japanese forerunners, use food as one of the important tools for presenting healing. In the above-mentioned Chinese healing style writer Anthony's masterpiece, *A Journey, through Time, with Anthony*, it is the delicious and exquisite food that adds joy to the solitude, tedium and hardship of Anthony's life of work and study. For example, the protagonist Anthony meets his old friend Cindy during his journey and she chooses a small restaurant where the food plays an important healing role making Anthony very comfortable and satisfied.

This is the best meal I've had since coming to France. All of the entrees are cooked and plated in cast iron containers. We drink wine and talk about many things. A girl who comes to France alone from Northern Europe sees our salad and praises it, so we share it with her. Then, the three of us got to talking together. We find out that

this little Scandinavian foodie is also reading Cindy's food blog. We say the world is too small (Anthony 169).

In this passage, the comment about "the best meal" and the utensils used to serve the food show Anthony's satisfaction and enjoyment. More importantly, the food and wine here are not just a treat for the taste buds, they are also a facilitator of emotional relationships. They are media for social contact with old friends, providing the emotional enjoyment of friendship. They also serve as an opportunity to meet new people who make the trip a pleasant surprise. Such delightful and fruitful experiences make Anthony's journey and life more beautiful.

This thesis examines the important healing role of the food element in both the discussion of healing style novels in this chapter and healing style anime in the next chapter. The book title of the Hong Kong edition of *Rushan, Gushu and Me* is *Asagi & Tree - The Healing Teahouse*. As the book title implies, tea is one of the most important vehicles for presenting healing in this novel. It appears in every case of healing and throughout the novel. This section carefully examines the role of tea in facilitating the healing process. I argue that in this novel, the healing power of tea is presented in three main sessions. The first cup of tea chosen by the healee reflects their state of being and is used to facilitate their self-reflection. In the second session, the customized tea makes the healee feel comfortable and deepens their trust in the healer, thus facilitating the healing process. In the third session, the ritual of making tea creates a calming atmosphere and the story of the tea gives the tea a specific cultural connotation that can inspire the healee.

#### *Tea Selected by the Healee at Their First Meeting*

In Asagi & Tree Studio, every new healee is greeted and served tea by Gushu before

meeting with Asagi. Gushu asks the healee to choose a kind of tea from the menu for themselves. By distilling and comparing the many cases in the novel it is shown that this first cup of tea not only helps the healers understand the state of the healees but is also used to facilitate their healing processes.

During this first tea selection process, Gushu does not give any advice and tries to satisfy new healers with whatever they want because the tea chosen by themselves is usually like a mirror of their condition at the time and their physical reaction after drinking it can help them understand what is self-inflicted. For example, one healee, when he is asked about the source of his liver depression during the healing process, he has sudden liver pain because he just drank the whiskey oolong special blend he ordered, which helps him realize that the culprits of his liver disease are sadness and alcoholism rather than the conflict between him and his father itself (36). In this case, ordering tea at Gushu's tea bar is not a simple session of drinking a certain drink. Combined with the following step of Asagi's healing session, the first cup of tea makes the healee understand the real cause of his situation.

Similar self-reflection processes occur with Lucy. Lucy selects Darjeeling black tea and asks Gushu to add some hot milk because she likes milk tea. However, during the subsequent session, Asagi makes Lucy realize that her stomach pains are related to her habit of adding milk to tea. Milk does not suit Lucy but she knows nothing about it (38). This is a depiction of the healing power of tea working on Lucy. The first cup of tea Lucy chooses for herself becomes the cue to the discovery of her stomach disease. It is not uncommon for counselors to discover the physical illness of the healee in the process of treating psychological problems

because mental and physical health are closely related. Psychological problems can easily lead to physical illness if not handled properly. This is one of the reasons why I choose this research topic to call for attention to mental health issues and actively taking countermeasures. In many developing countries, daily anxiety or emotional ups and downs are not taken seriously until they lead to severe mental illness or serious injury. According to the information accredited by World Health Organization (WHO), depression is a common illness worldwide. “Globally, it is estimated that 5% of adults suffer from depression.”<sup>31</sup> “Although there are known, effective treatments for mental disorders, more than 75% of people in low- and middle-income countries receive no treatment.”<sup>32</sup> Not including mood fluctuations or emotional responses to challenges in everyday life. Many people do not know how to deal with these emotional disorders effectively, and the backlog of these problems can make their mental health worse. For these people, the healing style, which is not only available in a variety of media forms but also accessible just online, can be one of the good choices. The rationale for using healing style books as one of the treatments for mild psychological problems can be supported by research on bibliotherapy. One of the important factors for bibliotherapy to work is for the reader to empathize with the characters or situations in the book. Some characteristics of healing media also allow them to resonate with a wide range of readers or viewers. This allows healing style media to have a similar therapeutic effect as bibliotherapy. Many studies have shown that bibliotherapy can have long-lasting effects in the treatment of depression. For example, Smith

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<sup>31</sup> World Health Organization. *Depression*. 30 January 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression> Accessed July 22, 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Evans-Lacko, S., et al. “Socio-Economic Variations in the Mental Health Treatment Gap for People with Anxiety, Mood, and Substance Use Disorders: Results from the WHO World Mental Health (WMH) Surveys.” *Psychological Medicine*, vol. 48, no. 9, July 2018, pp. 1560–71.

et al. conducted a three-year follow-up of participants from a previous bibliotherapy program. The results of their study indicate that not only can cognitive bibliotherapy be an effective treatment for mild to moderate depression in a general adult population but also that such treatment gains can be maintained at 3-year follow-up. Cognitive bibliotherapy offers the advantage that it is readily accessible and provides the opportunity for periodic booster treatments by rereading the book, which 48% of the participants reported doing (Smith et al. 326). The study of bibliotherapy by Smith et al. reveals that bibliotherapy can be effective in treating mild to moderate depression in the general adult population and it has the advantage of being easily accessible. Healing style media can achieve similar effects as bibliotherapy and are also easily accessible, so it has the potential to be an effective way for people in developing countries and regions to cope with daily stress or mild depression.

#### *Tea Provided by Gushu during and at the End of the Healing Process*

In addition to the first cup of tea chosen by the healees themselves, Gushu also customizes tea for the healee that matches their state of mind. This session of tea not only makes the healee feel comfortable but also deepens their trust in the healer and thus advances their healing. For example, Asagi's treatment makes Angel realize that it is not her husband's abandonment nor her mother's eccentricity that has brought her to the crisis, but her own malice and resentment that she does not want to admit. This sudden revelation of the truth shocks and confuses Angel to the point that she can hardly stand up when she wants to leave Asagi & Tree Studio (25). At this moment, Gushu offers her organic chamomile tea to calm her down and organic jujube cookies that raise her dropping blood sugar level. Gushu is such an attentive, thoughtful, helpful,

and supportive character. He is always aware of what the healee needs and does his best to help them. This is a complement to Asagi's slightly brutal approach to healing that uncovers the truth, which keeps the healee from being overwhelmed.

The tea that Gushu prepared for Lucy also plays an important role during her healing process. After Lucy drinks the first cup of tea that she ordered, black tea with milk, she feels sick in her stomach. Gushu then serves Lucy a Darjeeling black tea without milk, Asagi teaches her to put one hand on her stomach and feel the inner changes there. "Ah, it's wonderful. The stuffiness is gone, and now my stomach feels smooth." Lucy says (38). At Asagi & Tree Studio, the healing power of tea helps Lucy find the cause of her stomach pains and get the right drink for her so she can get rid of her unsuitable drinking habits and get a healthier lifestyle. The correction of such bad daily habits benefits Lucy's both physical and mental health. In this case, the healing power of the tea deepens Lucy's trust in the healers and makes a good pavement for the subsequent healing process.

#### *Tea Brewing and Tasting Process and the Inspiration of Tea Stories*

In addition to the functional role of tea analyzed above, the process of brewing and tasting tea depicted in the novel is full of beauty and enjoyment. At Asagi & Tree Studio, counseling is not just about words. Sometimes the tea itself and its cultural meaning can give the healee a stronger psychological message than words, which plays a significant role in the success of the healing process.

For example, after Asagi experiences the death of her ex-boyfriend and mother, Gushu gives her comfort not with words but with the company of tea. While Asagi silently watches

Gushu brew the tea, neither of them says anything. All that can be heard is the whispering of boiling and filling water (107). The ritual of making tea creates a peaceful and serene atmosphere, and it is in such a comforting setting that Asagi tastes a tea that helps her reconcile with her past. Gushu offers a cup of tea to Asagi and she takes a sip. What is surprising is that the taste of the tea makes her feel like she is drinking her own past. She suddenly feels a wave of desolate sadness come over her. When Asagi is about to cry, the tea flows deep into her throat, leaving a warm and firm aftertaste in her mouth that lingers long after several cups of tea. She suddenly releases her feelings and her eyes brighten up (107). There are many such detailed descriptions of tea brewing and tea tasting in this novel to show the magical healing power of tea. From Asagi's experience above, it is clarified that firstly, the tranquility of tea making has the power to calm the mind. Secondly, the bitterness of the tea makes Asagi feel that her painful experience is understood and the sweetness of the tea gives her the power to get rid of the pain. In a word, a fine cup of tea can elicit more thought than a million words.

Gushu then tells Asagi about the cultural connotations of this tea, "This is indeed an extraordinary tea. It is a winter frost oolong from Dayu Ridge after a snowstorm. The tea tree has endured the severe cold alone but is still sweet. It comforts the impermanent personnel with its strength. It is the most compassionate tea I have ever drunk, with the name Winter Wound." Asagi responds, "I have said nothing, but you can always probe into my heart and give me comfort" (107-8). This is how Gushu uses the cultural meaning of the tea to inspire and motivate Asagi. Gushu is apparently narrating a tea story, but he is actually exploiting the story of tea surviving a snowfall and becoming sweeter to persuade Asagi to cheer up and resurrect

herself. Further, Gushu is also using the story of the tea's experience and the strength it gives to tea tasters to inspire Asagi to use her ability to bring healing power to more people. It is with Gushu's encouragement and support that Asagi becomes brave enough to invite Gushu to work with her to establish Asagi & Tree Studio where they provide help to more healees like Lucy and Angel.

One of the special features of this novel worth mentioning is that it contains an exquisite Asagi & Tree tea menu, which contains information on the type of tea, origin, year, characteristics, taste, etc. of the ten types of healing teas invented by Gushu in the novel. This menu can help readers to taste and feel the healing power of tea while reading the novel. Many readers have commented on how much they love this tea menu and the depiction of tea in the novel. For instance, a reader on *Douban* commented, "This book introduces a lot of knowledge about tea in great detail. Not only does it make me fall in love with the ancient tea but it also tells us who we want to be".<sup>33</sup>

Overall, the novel presents healing by tea from three aspects. First, the first cup of tea chosen by the healee is like a mirror reflecting their state at the time. Their physical reactions after drinking the first cup of tea can indicate possible physical illnesses and facilitate self-reflection on their current situation. Second, Gushu's customized teas for the healee can both energize them at a critical point in the healing process and deepen the healee's trust in the healer. Third, the process of making tea, the feeling of drinking tea and the cultural meaning of tea can give the healee positive implication that is better than words. In these three ways, tea

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<sup>33</sup> Link to this comment: <https://book.douban.com/comment/1233228058>.

plays a considerable role in the whole healing process. It not only escorts all steps of the healee's recovery but also facilitates the healing process forward. In addition, the reader can also make full use of the tea list in the appendix to learn about the healing experience from the protagonist's healing process.

### ***Shortcomings of Chinese Healing Style Literature***

While acknowledging that Chinese style healing literature does not always cater to people's inertia in escaping reality, but rather confronts the emotional relationship crisis that plagues most Chinese people and tries to integrate psychotherapeutic theories and knowledge to propose practical solutions, the multiple healing elements used in Chinese healing style novels still have some shortcomings.

Both the characteristics of protagonists and the use of various sensory elements analyzed above play an important role in presenting healing in this novel. However, it is worth pointing out that these elements have been used by Japanese healing style writers for a long time. For example, the protagonists of Haruki Murakami's novels mentioned above are also ordinary people who are easily related to most people. Also, the above-mentioned Banana Yoshimoto's novel *Kitchen* uses food in a masterful way. I am not suggesting that Chinese healing style writers have copied their use of these healing elements. Su Hei's presentation of the healing power of tea and instruments such as singing bowls is distinctive. Nevertheless, such character settings and use of sensory elements have long been employed to perfection by Japanese healing style writers. As a result, the use of these elements in Chinese healing style novels seems to be less innovative.

Second, Su Hei's repeated use of auditory, visual, and gustatory stimuli throughout the novel to facilitate the healing of the protagonists is only some parts of the complete healing process that takes place. It is not easy to have a complete healing process like the ones portrayed in the novel in real life. For the readers, simply trying the healing power of tea, for example, probably cannot thoroughly resolve their emotional relationship crisis. In other words, the cases in this book may be more of an inspiration to the readers. Although the healing methods presented in the book are reasonable and can be learned from, the complete healing process is still complex and difficult for the reader to complete on their own. From this perspective, although Su Hei's use of various sensory elements does play a role in facilitating the healing of the protagonists, it is still hard to escape criticism similar to that made against Banana Yoshimoto's portrayal of delicious food. Combined with Su Hei's commercial promotion of the musical instruments and tea that appear in the text, it is difficult not to question whether this might give rise to an indulgence in some of the vehicles of presenting healing that appear in the novel and make it an escapist way of coping with some of the crises of modern life. However, these are only shortcomings in its use of some healing elements, which do not overturn the efforts of healing style fiction in presenting and resolving emotional relationship crises. The criticism that healing style literature is merely providing the illusion of transient comfort remains biased.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

By analyzing *Rushan*, *Gushu*, and *Me*, it can be concluded that this novel actively responds to the emotional relationship crisis facing most Chinese people and there are four

practical and complementary patterned steps in the healing process of the characters: 1) Creating a comfortable environment and calm emotions; 2) Collecting information in advance as clues; 3) Targeted counseling-style question-and-answer sessions; 4) Building courage and confidence to start over through rituals. These four steps incorporate a wealth of psychotherapeutic knowledge and play a pivotal role in the characters' healing process. The healing experience of the protagonists in the novel has lessons for some people in real life.

Secondly, the resonant protagonists and rich sensory stimulation play a crucial role in presenting healing power. *Rushan, Gushu, and Me*, like other Japanese or Chinese healing style novels, feature characters who are ordinary office workers or students living in the current Chinese or Japanese big cities, and the main conflict is the relationship crisis between them and their friends or lover or parents. These characters and the setting of the story are the bridge that builds empathy between the reader and the protagonist. This empathy ensures that the reader is able to immerse themselves in the protagonist's healing process and gain insight. The descriptions of instrumental sounds and songs in the text render a specific atmosphere and infect the emotions of the protagonists, thus, facilitating their recovery. Rich scenery descriptions can have an impact on the protagonist's feelings and attitude, moving the plot and healing process along. Tea appears throughout the healing process of each character. The first cup of tea chosen by the healees themselves is a reflection of their current state of being. Gushu's customized tea for the healees can deepen their trust in the healer, as well as energize and increase their confidence. Brewing and tasting the tea and the cultural meaning of the tea can give the healee a positive suggestion that exceeds words. In short, tea not only promotes

the healing of the main characters but the healing of tea can also be drawn by the reader. It is through the presence of these healing elements in the healing process of the protagonists that the novel presents its healing power. However, it is undeniable that the use of these healing elements has some shortcomings. Japanese authors have succeeded at utilizing the various elements used to present healing, therefore, Chinese healing style novels seem to lack innovation.

This chapter tackles how healing style novels respond to the collective plight of Chinese people and how they present healing. In the next chapter, I will switch to healing style anime as a subject of study with the same research questions.

## Chapter 4 Responding to the Urbanization Crisis in *The Legend of Hei*

The previous chapter reveals how healing style novels address emotional relationship problems. Healing style anime that I examine in this chapter, on the other hand, focuses on the relationship between human beings and modern society. These two matters seem different but are intertwined. Rapid urbanization has largely changed interpersonal relationships. For example, in contemporary China, since resources are centralized in a few big cities, a large number of rural residents have to leave their family to work in urban areas, which can lead to an increase in both the number of young people living alone in cities and the empty nesters in rural areas. This is not only a change of family structure. Such spatial separation affects their emotional relationships. What is worse is that many children of migrant workers are left behind to live with their grandparents or other relatives in their hometowns because they cannot access the educational resources in the big cities (Mu 7-13).<sup>34</sup> These children's lack of parental companionship from an early age affects their mental health as well as relationships. Many studies have shown that secure parent-child attachment can reduce the risk of depression while insecure attachment raises the risk (Shuang et al. 1). The existence of these problems in turn promotes reviews and changes of the rapid urbanization. Healing style anime is such a presence. The analysis of *The Legend of Hei* shows that healing style anime not only presents the problems caused by urbanization in a unique way but also considers what can support us in the

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<sup>34</sup> Mu conducts a chronological analysis of policies relevant to the wellbeing and schooling of floating children and left-behind children from the 1990s to the 2010s, which shows the inevitable barriers to schooling in cities for children of the migrants in China. Generally, floating children refer to rural-born children who are below the age of 16 and who have moved with their migrant parents or guardians to city and lived in the city for more than six months. Left-behind children refer to rural children who are below the age of 16 and who have one or both parents working in city and who live with their grandparents, extended family members, or other significant adults (e.g., family friends, school teachers) in rural communities. According to data and reports from China's sixth census, the population of floating children is 36 million and the number of left-behind children is 61 million.

face of the crises of modern life. The rapid urbanization discussed in this chapter is mainly the rapid and prioritized urbanization that took place in the context of the post-1978 coastal areas of China.

The second part of this chapter provides further measurements on the research question of how healing style anime presents healing. Since the purpose of this thesis primarily stays focus on a case study of Chinese healing style but not film studies, this study extracts the characteristic elements of healing in this anime in terms of scenes, colors, characters, food, and attitudes toward life, to contextualize its role in post-industrial society and to understand the reasons why healing has become a unique style and has an audience base instead of systematically analyzing the picture composition, sound configuration or camera use in *The Legend of Hei*. Meanwhile, I point out the shortcomings of healing style anime in providing solutions to collective dilemmas and using healing elements, which offers a more critical and comprehensive view of Chinese healing style anime.

### ***The Legend of Hei's* Response to the Crises Caused by Rapid Urbanization**

As reviewed in Chapter 2, many researchers and critics in both Japan and China believe that the healing style provides the illusion of comfort allowing people to relax temporarily from stress and escape from solving the problems that cause it. However, I suggest that the moderate rather than aggressive way in which the healing style presents and responds to real-life problems does not mean escapism. I argue that healing style actively presents and responds to issues most Chinese people face, and that is one of the key reasons for its popularity.

Taking the Chinese animation, *The Legend of Hei* directed by Mtjj as an example, I argue

that it is very concerned about living space and environmental crises caused by rapid urbanization and is good at presenting these problems in a unique metaphorical way. Furthermore, in terms of problem-solving, the anime does not offer specific solutions but the resolution of conflicts in the fictional stories inspires the importance of reliable intimate relationships in dealing with life's difficulties. This anime is about the spirit group led by Stormend and the Guild led by a human named Infinity fighting for survival space because rapid urbanization destroys the forest that was the habitat of spirits. Stormend attempts to use Hei's power, the Zone, to drive the humans out of the city and rebuild forest there. Infinity tries to stop Stormend's plan but he cannot beat the stronger Stormend. In the end, it is with Hei's help that Infinity defeated Stormend. Spirit Hei is willing to help humans fight spirits largely because of the friendship between him and Infinity. The anime spends a long time describing in detail the establishment of the friendship between Infinity and Hei, and the importance of their friendship hints at the significance of reliable relationships in the face of modern life crises. Although reliable intimacy is not a targeted scheme for living space and environmental crises, it is something that individuals can construct in their own lives, and it can be a supportive existence when facing various specific difficulties of modern life.

It is worth noting that such healing style anime or movies that reflect inappropriate urbanization leading to unlivable urban environments and people's desire to get in touch with nature or even return to their pre-modern lives are not unique to the Chinese healing style. Many Japanese healing style anime and films also provide reflections on people's difficulties in adapting to modern life. For example, in the popular Japanese healing style film series *Little*

*Forest*, adapted from a manga with the same name, the main character Ichiko returns to her hometown in the Tōhoku region, an almost isolated village, because she cannot integrate into the life of a big city. In the beautiful village, she lives kind of primitive farming life and focuses on making gourmet dishes with seasonal fruits and vegetables. In the breathtaking natural scenery that pervades the film, she spends a peaceful time with the company of friends, which heals Ichiko as well as the viewers of the film at the same time. The manga was also adapted by a Korean director into a Korean film of the same name. From the popularity of such healing style films among Asians, we can see the similar allegorization from the national to the regional of the flying geese model suggested by Leo Ching in explaining the popularity of *Doraemon* in Asia (Ching 250). Although the story in *Little Forest* is different from *The Legend of Hei*, their use of healing style elements such as delicious food, natural scenery, and reflections on urbanization are common.

In this section, I will first examine the two real-life issues raised in *The Legend of Hei*, the living space and environmental crises, and the unique way of healing style anime in presenting the issues. Thereafter, I will analyze the realistic significance of presenting these issues, which is how this story gives insights to cope with the crisis of modern life by emphasizing the importance of reliable friendship.

### ***Living Space Crisis***

*The Legend of Hei* is ostensibly a fictional story, but many elements of the anime are metaphors for real-life Chinese society. The fight for survival space between the humans and the spirits is highlighted from the first few minutes of the anime and continues throughout the

story. At the beginning of the film, Hei is living a leisure and happy life in a beautiful forest, but then some roaring excavators scatter the animals and spirits in the forest. Hei loses his habitat and has to settle in a garbage dump at a narrow alley between city buildings. Here comes the first line of the movie, “Don’t worry. We will find a new home” (*The Legend of Hei*, 00:37:30). The film begins with a vivid demonstration of the living space crisis of the main character, Hei. His plight has similarities with most people in contemporary China. In this sense, the spirits can be seen as a metaphor for people who are lost in China’s post-industrial society. The spirits who lost habitats are just like many rural inhabitants in China who have to leave their hometowns to find jobs in megacities. The wandering spirits in the city are similar to migrants who face enormous challenges in urban cities, the biggest of which is the exorbitant housing prices. More unfortunately, the sprawling cities and expanding economies over the past decades create an illusion that anyone can succeed as long as they work hard and the criteria for success permeate all stages of life, from school grades to job salary, properties, and so on. Once some of the criteria are not met, people seem to be left behind. Their sense of not being recognized or accepted by the post-industrial society is just like the spirits who cannot adapt to the city life in the anime. If the crisis of living space is material, the hard-to-get sense of belonging is tantamount to putting a spiritual yoke on it, which makes the situation worse.

In addition, the fight between humans and spirits in this anime suggests that the rapid urbanization that gets people into trouble in real life inevitably backfired to some degree. In *The Legend of Hei*, this backlash is manifested in some of the spirits threatening the safety of the city by destroying it and attempting to drive out the humans. These spirits metaphorically

refer to people who feel abandoned by society and have a negative attitude toward it. It is not difficult to find counterparts in real life and the presence of these groups of people is becoming a hidden danger to a safe and stable environment. In Japan, for example, many people isolate themselves away from society and family in a single room for decades after experiencing one or more traumatic episodes of social or academic failure. Those people who withdraw themselves from society, called *hikikomori*, exceed one million and have become a “new social issue” according to the latest news from *Japan Times*.<sup>35</sup> Studies have proved the existence of *hikikomori* among young people in urban areas of China (Liu et al.; Hu et al.). Even though the lifestyle of *hikikomori* is abnormal in modern society, it is unfair to arbitrarily assume that they are cowardly or incompetent, considering the social context in which they live. Table 1, House Price to Income Ratio Ranking of 10 Cities in China in 2022, further illustrates how difficult it is to buy a house of 90 square meters in the cities of China. In Hangzhou, for example, the ratio is 25.72, which means that for a couple living in Hangzhou to buy a house on their salary, they would have to save for 25.72 years or pay back the loan for that long. Their struggle to own a house makes it easy for them to empathize with the main character of the anime, Hei, who has no place to live in the city. *The Legend of Hei*'s representation of such living space crises faced by contemporary Chinese people builds a bridge that resonates with many viewers. This is consistent with how readers connect with the protagonists or situations in healing novels to achieve healing as mentioned in the previous chapter.

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<sup>35</sup> “613,000 in Japan aged 40 to 64 are recluses, says first government survey of hikikomori.” *Japan Times*, 29 Mar. 2019. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/29/national/613000-japan-aged-40-64-recluses-says-first-government-survey-hikikomori/>. Accessed 15 March 2022.

Table 1 House Price to Income Ratio Ranking of 10 Cities in China in 2022

Rank	Locations	Price To Income Ratio
1	Beijing	55.21
2	Shenzhen	44.03
3	Shanghai	43.81
4	Guangzhou	35.18
5	Hangzhou	25.72
6	Nanjing	23.66
7	Suzhou	20.99
8	Wuhan	20.57
9	Qingdao	19.60
10	Chengdu	17.29

Source: [Property Prices Index 2022 \(numbeo.com\)](https://numbeo.com)

Note: This table is created by the author and the information is taken from the website above. The House Price to Income Ratio is the most basic indicator of apartment affordability. It is generally calculated as the ratio of median apartment prices to median familial disposable income. This formula assumes and uses 150% of an individual's average net salary as a household's net disposable income. 50% is the assumed percentage of women in the workforce. The median apartment size is 90 square meters. The price per square meter the formula uses is the average price of one square meter in the city center and outside of the city center.

In addition to the metaphorical representation of the real-life existential crisis and its dire consequences analyzed above, this film also shows certain solutions. The shortcomings of these solutions can further promote reflection. For example, in this anime, the Guild is an institution that deals with the conflict between humans and spirits. It is mainly responsible for stopping

some of the spirits from destroying the city and helping some spirits adapt to the modern life of the human city. The film presents both positive and negative views on whether the Guild holds an unbiased position in dealing with the conflict. From the perspective of some spirits who depend on the Guild for survival, the Guild offers guidance for little spirits and helps old spirits adapt to the modern world so it is a spectacular place (49:06). They think that the human-spirit relationship has finally reached a delicate balance and the Guild is working on protecting the balance (49:54). However, this view is taken from the perspective of human interest. It ignores the fact that the city was originally a beautiful forest that was home to spirits but now it is the city of the humans and the original owners were asked to adapt to human urban life. In Stormend's view, the Guild disagrees with their values. As a result, they are defeated and have to leave their home (1:08:32). The so-called balance is actually based on the encroachment of the spirits' living space which is an unfair balance. Therefore, Stormend is committed to destroying the city and rebuilding forests. This constitutes the conflict of this anime, the struggle for survival space between the humans and the spirits. The direct cause of this conflict is that the balance maintained by humans in the anime is not a proper one. It endangers the living space of the spirits. This dilemma is identical to the real-life rapid urbanization that puts many people in a living space crisis. This allows many viewers to relate themselves to the situation of the spirits and consider how to achieve a better balance. For example, one viewer commented on *Bilibili*, "I think the theme of this movie is great. The contradiction between the city and the primitive ecology, different cultures or beliefs can all be incorporated. Like the movie says, the balance is too difficult to maintain and too easy to break. How to maintain the

balance is worthy of consideration by every one of us”.<sup>36</sup> There are also many viewers’ comments calling for the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. By establishing empathy with its viewers, the anime promotes reflections on the current situation and possible changes through showing the real-life crisis. This further strengthens the argument that healing style anime is more than a comfortable illusion.

### ***Environmental Crisis***

In addition to the living space crisis, deforestation is another important crisis caused by rapid urbanization that this anime is concerned with. Urbanization and industrialization inevitably cause some damage to the natural environment, such as deforestation and the emission of harmful gases. But human modernization should not be based on the uncontrolled destruction of the natural environment. China’s rapid urbanization in the context of a poor and weak society seeking to rejuvenate itself has led to the loss and destruction of the natural ecology in many urban areas. People living in concrete and steel are eager to get closer to nature. The healing style anime, *The Legend of Hei* presents these problems and appeals for changes.

This anime shows in many details the destruction of the natural environment by humans. Unlike some realistic movies that adopt a satirical or serious critical attitude, healing style anime instead expresses disappointment and helplessness more gently. In the opening theme of the anime, there is a short clip that proves this point: the main character, Hei loses his habitat and has to wander alone around the city and countryside. When he stumbles upon a small patch

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<sup>36</sup> Link to the comments on *Bilibili*:

[https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/media/md28221675/?spm\\_id\\_from=666.25.b\\_6d656469615f6d6f64756c65.2#short](https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/media/md28221675/?spm_id_from=666.25.b_6d656469615f6d6f64756c65.2#short).

Accessed July 22, 2022. There is no exclusive link to this comment. All the comments are listed in reverse chronological order on this page. The comment quoted here was posted by the viewer on December 20, 2021.

of forest, he is so surprised and eager to jump into the river for a dip, but then he realizes that everything has changed due to the modernization of mankind. He is covered by a plastic bag (See Figure 7) when he pokes his head out of the river. This is a short two-second silent clip that shows the poor living environment of the spirits. Hei's expression is full of disbelief and helplessness. This place is uninhabitable for the spirits, which is why he couldn't find a companion. The lonely Hei wanders around, which silently shows the damage caused by reckless modernization.

In the third minute of the film, an impressive sequence depicts Hei falling into a bottomless pit, as a mountain collapses due to human exploitation of forests. Hei appears as a tiny point in the middle of the picture while the disintegrating mountain occupies the whole screen (See Figure 9) (00:03:48). This visual extreme contrast gives a sense of oppression. Hei is portrayed as a weak figure here. In the face of the destruction of the forest, he is powerless and helpless. Humans certainly have reasons for destroying the forest, such as building roads and houses. However, instead of setting up a human perspective or defending humans through narration, the anime unilaterally shows the persecution suffered by the spirits from the perspective of the weak and the victim, Hei. This can help the viewer, humans in real life, to put themselves in the victim's shoes and think about the severity of the harm caused by their actions.

Then the camera shifts to the top of the mountain where there is an operating excavator (See Figure 10). Looking at this behemoth and the damage it causes, Hei's expression is full of helplessness (See Figure 8) (00:03:54). In this short clips, the background music gradually

becomes silent and the picture gradually becomes still, giving a sense of silent oppression and suffocation. It is through this immersive experience from the victim’s perspective that this anime presents the damage that people have done to the natural environment. The anime’s portrayal of the living space crisis fosters empathy, and helps to promote reflection and improvement among viewers who are facing a real-life environmental crisis. The evidence can be found in the viewers’ comments. For instance, “This film is very touching. How can I be a real human being? This movie gives me a proposition to think about and strengthens my determination to get involved in the environmental field in the future. I am committed to protecting the natural environment,” commented one viewer.<sup>37</sup> There are also many viewers expressed their praise for the focus on environmental protection in *The Legend of Hei*.

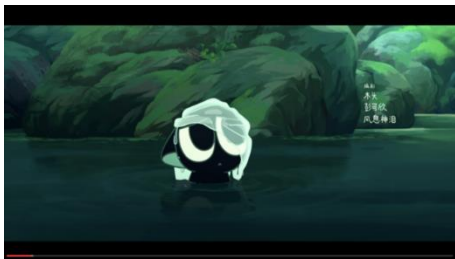


Figure 7 Plastic Bag

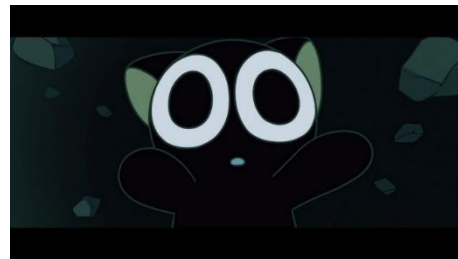


Figure 8 Hei’s Helpless Expression

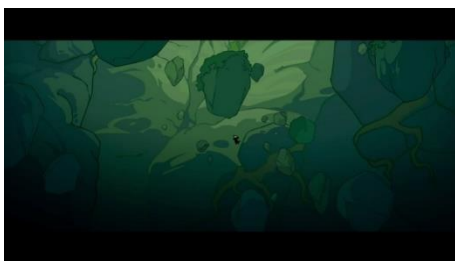


Figure 9 Tiny Hei in the Center of Screen

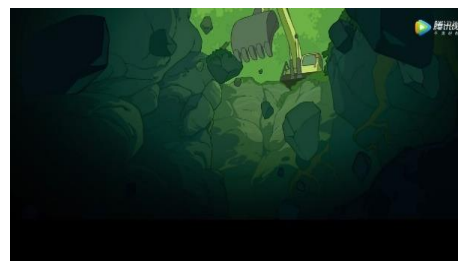


Figure 10 The Operating Excavator

In addition to the above ways, the main conflict of the anime also metaphorically warns

<sup>37</sup> Link to the comments on *Bilibili*:

[https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/media/md28221675/?spm\\_id\\_from=666.25.b\\_6d656469615f6d6f64756c65.2#short](https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/media/md28221675/?spm_id_from=666.25.b_6d656469615f6d6f64756c65.2#short).

Accessed July 22, 2022. There is no exclusive link to this comment. All the comments are listed in reverse chronological order on this page. The comment quoted here was posted by the viewer on July 15, 2021.

humans to reflect, or the consequences will be catastrophic. A group of spirits, led by Stormend, do not want to coexist with humans as other spirits do, but are committed to driving out all the humans and rebuilding the forest. The reason why they hate humans so much is that they witness how humans keep destroying forests without restraint throughout decades of modernization. Stormend says that this area used to be a paradise where lots of spirits were born and their presence made the forest grow lush and strong. However, then humans came and cut down trees to build houses and feed fires. As the modernization of mankind accelerated, they destroyed the forest and replaced it with a cold and concrete city (1:08:10). These spirits lost faith in humankind so when Hei suggests that if we hate humans that much, we can live somewhere far away from them. Stormend refuses seriously, “I do not mind moving. But it will not be long till there is nowhere left for us” (1:09:50). Such a story is the same as the real-life urbanization of many areas in China. The existence of spirits like Stormend warns humans in real life to control their destruction of the natural environment, or the consequences would be horrible.

In the rapid urbanization of China, urban and industrial buildings encroached on land that was originally farmland and forests. In a study based on Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) and socioeconomic data from 117 cities from 1982 to 2006, Sun et al. find that urbanization causes deterioration of urban vegetation across most cities in China, particularly in the eastern areas. In post-industrial China, there are an increasing number of people like the spirits in the anime do not adapt to the urban environment filled with steel and concrete and long to be close to nature. Research has shown that rapid urbanization has led to the loss and

degradation of urban green space, which can have a negative impact on urban ecosystems and the well-being of urban residents (Chen et al. 2). It is not uncommon to see news about some people escaping the city for a long or short period of country life. It is reported that two architects led family and friends to build some 10 square meter cabins in a forest more than 40 minutes away from downtown Wuhan. Although the cabins are small and not as well equipped as big houses in the city, they come to live in the cabins almost every weekend. They even say that if the children do not have to go to school in the city, they would like to live in the cabins in the forest every day (“Wuhan yijia” *Yitiao*).

The analysis in this section shows that healing style anime excels in using camera and visual language to silently present the destruction of the natural environment caused by rapid modernization in many details. The spirit’s appeal to recover the forest is also a metaphor for the real-life people’s desire to be close to nature. Such non-aggressive expression is easier to be accepted by the perpetrators, human beings. The way of using the victim’s perspective to present problems is conducive to viewers’ empathy for what happens to the spirits. These are unique ways in which healing style anime calls for change.

### ***Friendship Overcoming Difficulties***

The above analyzes how the healing style anime, *The Legend of Hei*, presents problems in post-industrial China in a unique way around the conflict between the spirits and the humans in the anime. Then comes the question, what is the realistic significance of presenting these problems? I argue that the resolution of the main conflicts of this story suggests the importance of quality intimate relationships in coping with the crises of modern life in reality.

In many scenes of *The Legend of Hei*, friendship is shown as established between two mutually hostile sides, the human, Infinity and the spirit, Hei. The story begins with Hei who lost his home because of rapid urbanization wandering in the city and being chased by human youth with weapons. The oppression of the humans on the living space of the spirits and the threat to their safety unfolds the confrontation between the humans and the spirits. Such bad experiences also make Hei believe that all humans are evil, and even later when Hei meets some kind people, he also treats them as enemies. For example, there is a human who tries giving food to the cute-looking Hei but is scared off by Hei's sudden fierce expression and aggressive posture (43:55). As Hei's prejudice and hostility toward humans reach a peak, the twist in the story occurs when Infinity accidentally catches Hei, and what happens on their way to the Guild changes Hei's view of the humans and the conflict between the spirits and the humans. When Hei figures out that the human baby who tries to touch him is not as scary as he thought (44:12), and the peach that a fruit farmer he met while hitchhiking shares with him is delicious (44:20), Hei's attitude toward humans gradually becomes complicated. He doesn't hate humans so much as before but still holds a grudge against them for making him lose his home. The subsequent appearance of Infinity's spirit friends further shakes Hei's hostility towards humans. The warm picture of Infinity and the spirits sitting around enjoying a meal together makes Hei reconsider the relationship between humans and spirits. Humans and spirits are not necessarily hostile to each other. Infinity's spirit friends' view on humans and spirits also influences Hei. There are good and bad people, and just as there are spirits (49:51).

After Hei witnesses Infinity helping the police subdue a robber, Hei begins to trust Infinity

and accepts him, a seemingly unfriendly human, as his friend. This can be seen from the fact that when Infinity takes Hei for a ride on his motorcycle, Hei happily nibbles on an apple while chatting with Infinity as easily as a friend for the first time (53:00). Later, when Stormend's accomplices attack the subway and Infinity is busy fighting with them, Hei does not stand on the side of the spirits but protects humans on the subway (1:02:15). This is the first time that Hei helps humans. It is since then that Hei changes his view of the conflict between humans and spirits and shifts away from the prejudice that all humans are evil while all spirits are victims and their overreaction is justified. The establishment of friendship between Infinity and Hei illustrates that true friendship is based on trust and unity of perception of the problem.

The friendship between the spirits and the human eventually aids humans in defeating Stormend, implying the importance of quality relationships in dealing with crises of modern life. In the anime, the two sides of the conflict are the humans' rapid urbanization and the spirits who want to drive out humans and replace cities with forests. The result of uncontrolled expansion of the city is undoubtedly terrible, but hatred of urbanization is also unjust. The friendship between the spirit Hei and the human Infinity plays an important mediating role in the conflicts and stops the war in the end.

There are also many studies that have shown the importance of quality relationships for happiness. A Harvard study of adult development has tracked the lives of 724 men since 1938 trying to figure out what makes a life good. According to the fourth director of the study Robert Waldinger, solid and close relationships keep people happier and healthier.<sup>38</sup> Waldinger also

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<sup>38</sup> Waldinger, Robert. "What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness." *YouTube*, uploaded by TED, 25 July 2016, <https://youtu.be/8KkKuTCFvzI>.

explains that good relationships do not have to be smooth or free of fights all the time, but depend on people's feeling that they can really count on each other in difficult times. In the face of the various crises of modern life, a reliable relationship is not a specific solution to the problems of the environment and living space, but it can enhance the ability of individuals to cope with the difficulties of life. How to build good interpersonal relationships? This is a difficult subject but healing style anime shows us that even different species that are hostile to each other can build deep friendships, therefore, why can't human beings be friends with each other? This anime conveys a positive attitude and confidence by showing this possibility.

In conclusion, *The Legend of Hei* warns people to make changes by metaphorically showing living space and environmental crises and hinting at possible catastrophic consequences. At the same time, the resolution of the main conflict in the story inspires the importance of reliable relationships in facing the difficulties of modern life. The anime's presentation and resolution of the crises facing most Chinese people strengthen the argument that healing style anime is not merely relieving stress temporarily with the illusion of comfort. This also supports the use of healing style as an effective approach to dealing with numerous pressures of modern life. In the next section, I will further analyze the characteristic elements used to present healing in this anime.

### **Healing Elements of Chinese Healing Style Anime**

In addition to the above analysis of healing style anime's response to collective dilemmas, healing style anime has particular choices of scenery, colors, characters, food, and life attitudes in order to present healing. In this section, I argue that the abundant portrayal of natural scenery,

the palette of blues and greens, the lovable characters, the food as an emotional bond, and the positive attitude towards life in *The Legend of Hei* all contribute to presenting healing. This is because they cater to the psychological needs of people who desire to be close to nature, relax, enjoy delicious food, have good relationships, and live happily. These particular means of rendering healing become important features that distinguish healing style anime from other types of anime.

### ***Scenery and Colors***

As an independent visual language, color is an important modeling element and narrative means in the animation. Healing style anime has its unique aspects in the use of colors. The gentle techniques used in the representation of human destruction of nature analyzed in the previous section continue in the use of color. There are few stark contrasts between light and dark or exaggerated color matching. Instead, the color palette is primarily bright blue and fresh green in *The Legend of Hei* (See Figure 11 Blue Sea and Green Island, 12 Blue Sky, 13 Green Leaves, 14 Blue Sky and Green Field, 15 Green Forest). From the time these screenshots were taken, it can be seen that such a palette is not concentrated in some particular clips but can be found throughout the film. The main character Infinity's clothes, pupils, hair, and Hei's clothes, pupils, and ears all show various dark or light blue or green elements (See Figure 16). Moreover, there seem no changes in seasons. Whether the tall trees or the short shrubs always display a green color and the sea always shows a beautiful blue color. Jing Li also analyzed this aspect in her study of the healing function of a very popular Japanese healing style anime, *Natsume's Book of Friends*. She attests that the story often takes place in summer when the foliage is lush,

providing a good color background for the purpose of healing (J. Li 2).



11 Blue Sea and Green Island (00:17:27)



12 Blue Sky (01:36:44)



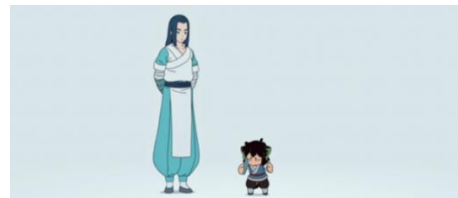
13 Green Leaves (00:51:40)



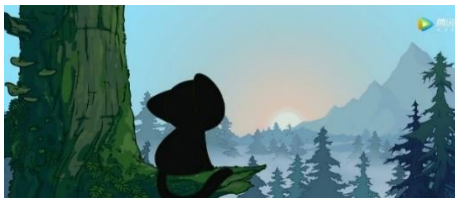
14 Blue Sky and Green Field (00:04:49)



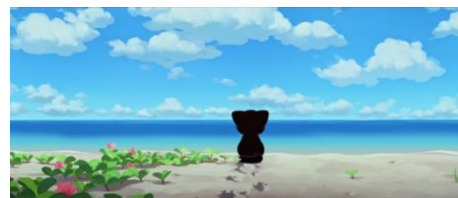
15 Green Forest (00:43:18)



16 Infinity (left) and Hei (right)



17 Sunrise



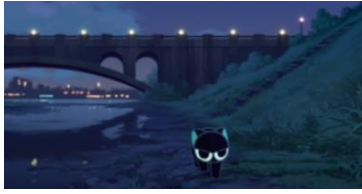
18 Sea

Such use of color in this anime has to do with the properties and cultural connotations of the colors themselves, as well as the natural scenery the anime presents. First of all, the green color itself can relieve nervous tension and relax the mood. In terms of cultural connotation, the nature and life force symbolized by green help with presenting healing. The presentation of nature caters to the needs of people living in urban environments who desire to be close to nature, and green is the most representative color essential for presenting natural scenery. These

three points are also the important reasons why green is the main color of healing style anime.

Furthermore, in its way of presentation, the healing style anime gives the audience a sense of immersive experience as much as possible. Specifically, the natural scenery is mostly shown in panoramic and distant views to give the audience an immersive perspective as if they were standing at a high distance looking at the scenery. Figure 5 illustrates an aerial view of the sea and an island. Figure 15 shows a distant view of the forest. The magnificent sea, vast turquoise sky and other beautiful natural landscapes are interspersed in this way throughout the film.

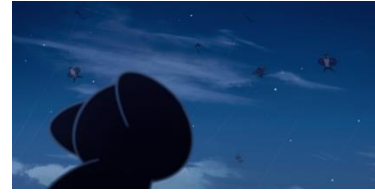
In addition, the beauty of nature is often seen from the perspective of the main character, Hei (See Figure 17, 18). As analyzed in the preceding section, spirits are metaphors for some people in modern life. Hei in the anime guides these people to appreciate nature. The clip from Figure 19 to Figure 21 shows the homeless Hei from being hostile to the human city to noticing the beautiful night sky. Hei's eyes immediately turn from discontent to amazement and then stop to enjoy the beauty of nature. The unchanging beauty of the sky becomes a comfort to Hei as he wanders in a deserted corner of the city. This unchanging aspect also seems to be the embrace of nature that can re-accept mankind at any time, which allows Hei as well as possible viewers to regain a leisure and tranquil state of mind. Hongmiao Meng also affirms the effectiveness of nature's healing power in her study of Japanese healing style culture with the example of *Spirited Away*. "In urbanized areas, the land is a resource that needs to be fully utilized. Many people are unable to get close to nature. The love for the beauty of nature in healing style anime meets the psychological needs of the audience, thus making viewing the film an experience of healing" (Meng 68).



19 Hei Is Discontented



20 Hei Notices Sky

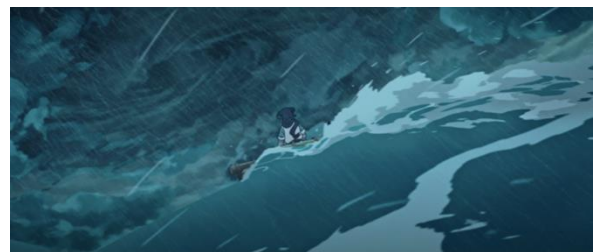


21 Hei Admires Starry Sky

In Dongmei Zhang's study of the natural aesthetic characteristics of Japanese healing style films, she claims that healing style anime avoids the majestic aspects of nature (e.g., steep mountains, waves, etc.) and scenes of major changes (e.g., hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, etc.) in order to show the unchanging aspects of nature (Zhang 80). Interestingly, *The Legend of Hei* shows scenes such as waves and tsunamis. Figure 22 shows the unpredictability of weather changes at sea. Figure 23 shows Infinity and Hei swaying on the sea surface, demonstrating the insignificance and weakness of human beings in the face of natural disasters. The popularity of this anime shows that the presence of such scenes does not affect its healing presentation. On the contrary, it allows people who have been staying in the unchanging city buildings for a long time to appreciate the great power of nature and regain a sense of reverence for it. This also echoes the theme of the anime appealing to people to reflect on rapid urbanization and protect nature.



22 Gale, Wave and Lightning



23 Infinity and Hei Swaying on the Sea

### ***Resonant Character Traits***



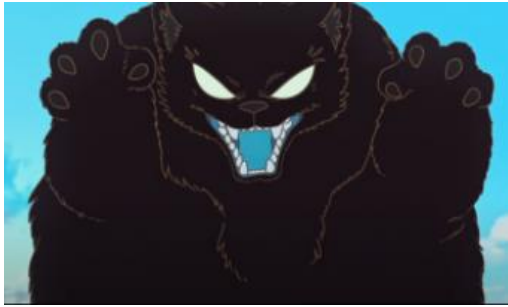
24 Cat Form



25 Boy Form

As a healing style anime, *The Legend of Hei* has special features in its characters' image and characterization. The image design of this anime continues its usual gentle style. There are no exaggerated lines or shapes. Their costumes do not have extra embellishments and folds, but a sketchy style. Hei, for example, has a rounded silhouette and simple lines. Besides, Hei, as a spirit, has not only a cute cat shape (See Figure 24) but also can also be transformed into the human form of an adorable little boy (See Figure 25). Hei's cat form mainly appears in the early part of the story. The most important feature of Hei's cat form is the big round innocent eyes and Hei's emotions are expressed through these eyes. In the early part of the story, Hei loses his home due to urbanization. Hei's aggression and pity are perfectly illustrated through these attention-grabbing big black eyes. The human form of Hei is as agile and expressive as the cat form. He looks like an energetic, mischievous and lovable little boy. Cat ears and tail in his body do not stand out but look cute and intimate. In case of danger, Hei makes his size huge and shows a fierce expression (See Figure 26) to scare the enemy but never succeeds because he is still the same naive Hei (See Figure 27). This contrast also brings humorous effects. Such characteristics give Hei, the main character of the anime, the possibility of being accepted by the audience at first glance, which becomes the basis for the audience to disarm any possible

prejudice and wariness and resonate with him.



26 Hei Pretends to Be Fierce



27 Big, Naïve Hei

In addition to his physical characteristics, Hei's personality is easy to be related to. Although Hei's image is simple, his personality is multi-faceted. Most people can more or less see themselves in Hei's character. For example, He is powerless against Infinity, but he is not devastated after being caught. This shows his optimism. Taken on a raft by Infinity, Hei tries to escape but when he sees the huge fish in the sea, he retreats back in fear. Hei has a timid side like everyone. On their long way to the Guild, Hei is quickly recaptured each time but he tries to escape again and again, which suggests that Hei is weak but indomitable. This does not mean that Hei is stubborn. Rather, we can see from his change of attitude towards humans that he is reasonable and compassionate. At the end of the story, his act of helping Infinity to defeat Stormend shows his bravery and consideration. Such multiple characters make Hei's character image more stereoscopic and real. He is no longer just an image in the anime, but more like most people in real life.

In Yan Meng's research on healing style, she analyzes how it presents healing using the representative Japanese anime *Natsume's Book of Friends* as an example. Yan Meng summarizes some characteristics of healing anime in terms of character design. "The characters always have simple outline lines, simple hairstyles and warm hair colors. They wear casual

clothes without any flashy accessories. All the characters look like the ordinary people around us in real life. The look of the spirits in the anime is not hideous but cute” (Yan Meng 45). These descriptions also fit the features of the characters in *The Legend of Hei*. Like the characters of many healing style movies, Hei is simple and cute in appearance that can be accepted by most people. Hei’s personality is rich and multi-faceted like a real person around us. Such resonant character traits can help viewers immerse themselves in the healing power presented in this anime.

### ***Food as Emotional Bond***

The heartwarming scenes of sitting together and sharing delicious food appear many times in *The Legend of Hei*, which plays a crucial role in unfolding plots as well as presenting healing. In these scenes, food often serves as a bond of emotional connection and an opportunity to build or improve relationships. For example, Stormend brings homeless Hei to the spirits’ place. At first, Hei is not very trusting of the new place and the strange spirits there. The way the spirit group welcome Hei’s arrival is by gathering around the campfire and roasting meat (See Figure 28). Such a lively scene makes him smile for the first time (See Figure 29). One of the most gluttonous spirits generously shared his food with Hei. Figure 30 is a close-up shot showing Hei’s happiness and surprise after eating the delicious food. It is such a warm and pleasant experience that Hei completely drops his guard and decides to stay in this place and integrate into this community of spirits.



28 Sitting Together



29 Hei Smiles for the First Time



30 Hei's Expression



31 A Human Shares Peach with Hei



32 Hei's Expression after Eating Peach



33 Infinity and His Human Friends

Delicious food can also become an emotional link between spirits and humans. It succeeds in changing Hei's hostile attitude towards humans. Figure 32 shows a close-up of Hei's surprised and satisfied expression after taking a bite of a delicious and juicy peach that he receives from a farmer while hitchhiking (See Figure 31). The peach becomes a tie that brings a spirit and a human closer to each other. Let Hei feel the friendliness of humans. Right after this experience, Hei sees Infinity and his spirit friends sitting around and eating a delicious midnight snack (See Figure 33). Such a warm and friendly scene makes Hei realize that there can be more than war but also friendships between humans and spirits. Their interactions also change Hei's view of humans, spirits and the hostile relationship between them. This change

in perception is significant to Hei's final decision to help humans. Further, for ordinary viewers of this anime, this process of building good relationships demonstrates the possibility of obtaining a good relationship and the satisfaction that comes from it. It also shows the possibility of friendship between different and conflicting species. Such positive examples can touch people who feel lonely in modern life and increase their courage and confidence to build good relationships.

The above means of using delicious food as a medium of emotional communication to present healing is not unique to healing style anime. Healing style novels also share this characteristic. The analysis of the healing power of tea in Chapter 3 confirms this point. In the novel *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, Gushu gives Asagi, who loses her family members, a more powerful comfort than words by sharing with her the process of making and tasting tea as well as the story of the tea. In this way, Asagi overcomes her own emotional crisis and uses her ability to bring healing power to more people. It is evident that in different forms of healing style media, food is an important element in presenting healing.

### ***Positive Attitude***

After losing his habitat, Hei says to himself, "Don't worry, we'll find a new home." This is the first line of the movie and it appears in the scene of the city's garbage heap. In such a difficult situation, where can he find a new home? Hei, however, does not complain or feel sorry for himself. Even though he knows nothing about the future and where to go, he still has a positive attitude to face these difficulties. In real life, many people are facing the same problem of where to settle down due to the exorbitant housing prices. While the film raises this

issue, it conveys an optimistic attitude that the problem can be solved and the future will be better. This is an encouragement to real-life people facing similar problems to Hei.

More positive examples permeate the details of the film's scenes and character settings. For example, not all spirits who lost their habitats are facing a serious crisis of living space, and not all of them are unable to adapt to modern life. The film also depicts some spirits living well in human cities, and some spirits like humans and their cities. For example, Hei and Infinity meet a junior floral spirit when they first arrive in the city. She is brought to the human city by Infinity as well. She gets a job delivering flowers. She happily rides her motorcycle through the city and her language, expressions and movements are all energetic, showing that she has adapted very well to modern life. The presence of such positive secondary characters suggests that the conflict in the story is not unresolvable but will move forward to a better direction. These positive hints also appear in many tiny details of the scenes. For example, Figure 28 depicts Hei and Infinity sitting and eating happily together after their relationship begins to ease. On the yellow background of the scene, it is written in white letters: Enjoy the simple things in life (See Figure 28). Even though life is difficult, it is still possible to have a little dose of happiness. In a word, the anime presents an optimistic attitude everywhere, from the characterization of the main character to the backdrop. It is this repeated message that the problems are solvable and the future is optimistic that can give the viewers the same confidence and inspiration.



### 34 Enjoy the Simple Things in Life

However, excessive optimism is not realistic, and healing style films are not meant to create such an illusion. In addition to an optimistic approach to life, the anime also conveys an objective view of right and wrong through Hei's judgment of the relationship between humans and spirits. As a healing style anime, it also has a special way of conveying values. Hei does not start with a clear understanding of the relationship between humans and spirits but goes from being full of prejudice to gradually changing and finally removing it. In the early part of the story, Hei believes that all humans are evil and Stormend is his best friend. When Infinity asks Hei, "Why are you always so mad at me?", Hei replies without thinking, "Cause you're a bad guy." Infinity retorted, "So is Stormend." Hei subconsciously opposes Infinity's argument but can't make a convincing case for it (42:39). By the middle of the story, after Hei learns more about humans when Infinity asks him a similar question, Hei's answer changes: "Stormend isn't a bad person. Neither are you" (54:59). At the end of the film, Hei turns around and asks Infinity the question, "Was Stormend bad?" Infinity doesn't try to convince Hei of his point of view but simply tells him, "That's a question you'll have to answer for yourself" (1:33:20). This statement is not only Infinity's words to Hei, but also the value that the film wants to express in a non-offensive way through Infinity's mouth. This process of Hei's changing in judgment is a metaphor for the process of cognitive refinement that people in real

life need to go through. Hei's experiences and growth show the possibility and importance of each person's ability to remove prejudice and gain objective judgment.

### *Shortcomings of Chinese Healing Style Anime*

The analysis in the first half of this chapter confirms that healing style anime is very much concerned with the crises caused by the rapid modernization that most Chinese people are currently facing. This reinforces the argument that the Chinese healing style is not just an easy-to-indulge illusion of comfort created to avoid confronting problems. Nevertheless, healing style is only one of the many ways of coping with the crises of modern life. It is not perfect and infallible. In other words, although healing style anime deserves to be acknowledged for positively reacting to the crises of modern life and proposing solutions, it seems that there are some shortcomings in the coping methods presented by the anime.

As analyzed above, this anime suggests that reliable intimate relationships can be a supportive presence in the face of some of the problems of modern life. While this is true, it is not a targeted strategy regarding the difficulties of modern life but a valid way of survival in any era or social context. Moreover, it is precisely the point of relying on intimacy that also implies that individuals do not have to be very independent but can rely on others. From this perspective, such a coping strategy, which emphasizes the establishment of reliable intimate relationships, risks leading to a tendency of weakening the individual's ability to solve problems independently and increasing dependence on others. To some extent, this strategy is an escape from solving problems on one's own.

Furthermore, a reliable intimate relationship can be a source of reliance when we face

personal difficulties. However, this strategy alone is not sufficient in the face of collective crises such as the environmental crisis analyzed above. In general, although the healing style anime is actively presenting and responding to the collective plight facing Chinese people, there is a limit to what the healing style anime can do. This critical insight into healing style further positions it as one of many effective ways to address the stresses of modern life and it is unrealistic to rely on only it as a complete solution to all crises.

Finally, in the presentation of healing power, healing elements such as beautiful nature, delicious food, harmonious relationships, and positive attitudes cater to the psychological demands of the target audience thus achieving healing. However, these healing elements are essentially a kind of “alternative” for the audience’s unmet needs in real life. Although some researchers affirm the role of such alternative satisfaction, for instance, Kang Wu, in his study on the popularity of healing style culture among young people, argues that “the alternative imagery provided by healing style anime is indeed helpful in balancing people’s psychological compensation mechanism” (Kang Wu 97), the effect of such substitution is limited. Substantial changes in life situations still require individual efforts in all aspects of reality. Overall, while healing style anime can provide the power to heal, it is clearly unrealistic to pin all hopes of a better life on it.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

Chinese healing style anime is not intended to be a short-lived indulgence. Instead, it is very much concerned with the intractable dilemmas that people encounter in modern life. This is not to say that, as an anime, it offers a panacea that can solve all problems. Faced with the

problems of the modernization process, there is a limit to how much an anime can solve. But that doesn't stop it from conveying wisdom for dealing with difficult modern life through the way the conflict is resolved in the story. From the long and detailed portrayal of the establishment of a friendship between a human and a spirit and the fact that this solid friendship helps them win the war, it can be concluded that good intimate relationships are undoubtedly crucial in the face of various difficulties in life.

The second part of this chapter provides a detailed analysis in the feature of the scenes, colors, characters, food and attitudes of life in *The Legend of Hei* and critically incorporates the views of some previous researchers. From these examinations, it is concluded that healing style anime often use blue and green to depict nature scenes in large portions. The main characters are often cute and have multi-faceted and relatable personalities. The appearance of food is not accidental but plays a significant role in establishing and promoting good relationships and resolving conflicts. Positive attitudes toward life and objective judgment pervade many details of this anime. These are important characteristics that distinguish healing style anime from other types of anime.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

### Research Questions and Answers

There are two main research questions. Firstly, is the Chinese healing style media simply creating instant comfort for users to indulge themselves and avoid facing the problems that cause discomfort? In other words, do Chinese healing style media respond to some problems facing Chinese people today? Secondly, how does healing style media present healing? For these two questions, I choose a Chinese healing style novel and a Chinese healing style anime as the primary materials for analysis. The third and fourth chapters of this thesis provide answers to these two questions using these two different types of healing style media as examples, respectively.

Chapter 3 addresses whether and how Chinese healing style media respond to some of the collective problems facing Chinese people, how the healing occurs in the novel, and whether it has any inspiration for real-life people. Firstly, since the novel, *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, is highly concerned with the relationship crisis faced by Chinese people today and actively offers solutions, it can be concluded that Chinese healing style novels do not always create the illusion of comfort. This novel revolves around the emotional relationship crises faced by the protagonists and offers practical solutions that are referenceable for readers. A careful analysis of several cases of healing in *Rushan, Gushu and Me* reveals that there are four model steps in the healing process of the healees and that the psychotherapeutic knowledge integrated into these four steps plays an important role in the advancement of the healing. The four patterned steps are: 1) Creating a comfortable environment and calm emotions; 2) Collecting information

in advance as clues; 3) Targeted counseling-style question-and-answer sessions; 4) Building courage and confidence to start over through rituals.

Secondly, elements such as resonant protagonists and rich sensory stimulation play a key role in presenting healing. *Rushan, Gushu, and Me* has protagonists that can arouse great resonance with readers. They are ordinary office workers or students who, like most Chinese people, are facing relationship crises with friends or loved ones or parents. These characters build a bridge of empathy between the reader and the protagonist. This empathy ensures that readers can immerse themselves in the protagonists' healing process and gain insight. Various instrumental sounds and songs as well as rich depictions of scenes render a specific atmosphere and infect the emotions and attitudes of the main characters, thus facilitating their recovery. Tea is used throughout and facilitates the healing process of each character. Its role can be summarized into three aspects: 1) The tea chosen by the healee themselves is a reflection of their current state; 2) The tea customized by the healer for the healee can deepen their trust in the healer and also energize them and increase their confidence; 3) The process of brewing and tasting tea and tea stories can give them the strength to get rid of their pain and overcome difficulties with positive hints. The enlightening effect of the resolution of the protagonist's emotional relationship crisis on the readers can be seen in the readers' comments. Some healing approaches such as music and tea used in the novel are also practiced by the readers.

Although it is identified that Chinese healing style novels actively confront the emotional relationship crises and offer solutions, there are still some shortcomings in their use of healing elements. The various elements used to present healing have been well-adopted by Japanese

writers, and thus the use of these elements in Chinese healing style fiction appears to lack innovation. The promotion of sensory-evoking teas and singing bowls risks creating an indulgence in these tools. The critical examination of healing style literature helps to accurately identify its function and to more appropriately use it to deal with the stresses of modern life.

Chapter 4 uses *The Legend of Hei* as an example to answer whether and how Chinese healing style anime responds positively to the issues facing most Chinese people and how healing style anime presents healing. First, by analyzing the unique metaphorical way of showing the living space and environmental crises in the anime and the close connection between the crises shown in the story and the current situation of most Chinese people in real life, it is concluded that healing style anime is not an illusion of comfort created to escape from reality but is very concerned with the collective plight facing Chinese people and tries to offer solutions. The significance of friendship in overcoming difficulties in the anime reveals that reliable relationships can be a powerful support to face the difficulties in modern life.

Regarding the issue of how healing style anime presents healing, critical analyses of the scenes, colors, characters, food and attitudes toward life in *The Legend of Hei* lead to the conclusion that healing style anime has the following typical characteristics that distinguish it from other types of anime: 1) Extensive use of green and blue colors and natural scenery such as forests and the sea; 2) Characters are easy to relate to most people in real life; 3) Using delicious food as a way to build and promote relationships; 4) Presenting optimistic attitude and objective judgment. At the same time, we have to admit that *The Legend of Hei's* responses to the collective crises facing the Chinese people are inadequate and can hardly avoid the

criticism of escapism.

Finally, while *The Legend of Hei* positively responds to the collective crisis facing the Chinese people, the solutions it proposes cannot solve all the problems of modern life and the use of some healing elements is only an alternative way to satisfy people's unfulfilled psychological needs in real life. Recognizing these shortcomings of healing style anime helps to position its function as one of many solutions to the stresses of modern life. It is helpful but not a panacea.

Given the same purpose of the research questions on the two types healing style media, although this thesis did not devote a separate chapter to make a comparative analysis between them, it reveals some of their commonalities. First, they both focus on relationships in the context of post-industrial China. Healing style fiction is concerned with emotional relationship crises while healing style anime focuses on the relationship between people and modern society. They seem to be two different issues but are intertwined. The transformations into modernization have also changed the relationships between people. The change in relationships between people also drives the reflection on modern life. Second, in conjunction with the analyses in Chapters 3 and 4, it is clear that the characters and their crises in the novel and anime are both easy to relate to most people in real life. The reason is that such characteristics are conducive to conveying the power of healing by building empathy with readers or viewers. In addition, both the novel and the anime make full use of natural scenery and delicious food to present healing but are inevitably criticized for imitating their Japanese pioneers in the use of these healing elements.

Besides, the similarities and differences between Chinese and Japanese healing style are a very broad and complex issue. Healing style has a variety of media forms, and one healing style media can have multiple manifestations. For example, there are Chinese healing style novels that are similar to “chicken soup for the soul” and those that focus on the problems people face in real life, as chosen for this thesis. Therefore, it is very difficult to completely address this question. This thesis does not devote a separate chapter to comparing Chinese and Japanese healing style but it does use the history of Japanese healing style as a background for the study of Chinese healing style in Chapter 2 and gives examples of Japanese healing style media in Chapters 3 and 4 as references for the analyses of Chinese healing style media. Thus, this thesis reveals some of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Japanese healing style in several specific aspects: 1) Chinese healing style came from Japan and became popular in China about a decade later than in Japan. The commonality that they both emerged in post-industrial period reveals the difficulties that post-industrial societies have caused to people's well-being. Awareness of this issue is necessary not only at the broad level of building a better society, but also at the personal level of living a better life; 2) The representative media forms of healing style in China and Japan are different. In Japan, the healing style was originated in literature and the timeline of its development from literary forms to other forms of media such as music and movies can be traced. In China, however, the most popular form of healing style media is variety shows. This difference is related to the evolution of the medium itself, which involves many factors and is a very interesting topic for further research; 3) In analyzing what elements *Rushan Gushu and Me* and *The Legend of Hei* use to present healing,

I cite some Japanese healing style as one of the references for the analyses. This reference reveals similarities between their use of healing elements, such as food, scenery, and character settings. But this does not mean that the content of these elements is the same. Taking the example that they both use protagonists that resonate, this does not mean that the protagonists of Chinese and Japanese healing style media are the same. They also have many characteristics of their own cultural backgrounds, such as their living environments, behaviors and personality, etc.

### **Significance of This Study**

First of all, this thesis contributes to the gap in healing style studies in the following three respects:

1) Few scholars have specifically studied how the Japanese healing style was able to spread to China. As far as theoretical contributions are concerned, firstly, this research consolidates the mainstream views on the history of the healing style in Japan as the basis for subsequent research. Secondly, the thesis explains how healing style can spread from Japan to China and be localized in China from two new perspectives, namely cultural regionalization and world literature. Thirdly, in the Introduction chapter, the thesis explains the emergence of healing style in the context of economic, political and cultural factors in post-1978 China. It not only provides a background for following research but also highlights the unique role of healing style in contributing to the well-being of people in post-industrial China. In addition, this study explains the effectiveness of healing style media from the perspective of bibliotherapy. In summary, the thesis provides some theoretical implications for the

dissemination, localization, and application of the healing style.

2) Since the healing style originated in Japan and has a longer history in Japan than in China, scholars have studied more on Japanese healing style and less on the Chinese setting. One of the contributions of this thesis is the use of Chinese healing style media as primary research materials to provide a more comprehensive analysis of how they present healing and a more nuanced understanding of their responses to collective crises in the social context of China. The findings of this thesis show that both types of healing style media, whether they are novels or anime, whether they are based on real cases or purely fictional, are very concerned with the collective crisis that most Chinese people face. This challenges the view held by many Chinese and Japanese scholars and critics that healing style do not care about social reality and just use media to create the illusion of comfort in order to avoid real-life problems.

3) Current research on Chinese healing style has focused on analyzing the characteristics of a particular type of media or its drawing from Japanese or Korean healing style. Few scholars have systematically examined two or more types of healing style media in parallel in an attempt to uncover the commonalities between them in Chinese context. Through a detailed examination, this thesis reveals that though the media forms of healing style are diverse, they share certain commonalities in terms of content. Both Chinese healing style novels and anime are concerned with the relationships in contemporary China, either between individuals or between humans and social and natural environments they live in. It is also because of the close connection between their focus and the reality of post-industrial China, they share a commonality in the setting of protagonists and the social backgrounds in which the stories take

place. Basically, the stories take place in a post-industrial China, and the protagonists are easy to relate to most people in real life. In addition, both Chinese healing style novels and anime make good use of natural beauty and food as a vehicle for presenting healing.

Moreover, this thesis provides inspiration for the creation and application of healing style media. The tracing of the emergence and dissemination of healing style in Japan and China and the elaboration of the two types of Chinese healing style media provide a theoretical background and two referenceable examples for the creation of the healing style media. Specifically, it provides the creators with the ins and outs of healing style. The crises reflected in *Rushan, Gushu and Me* and *The Legend of Hei* provide creators with examples of the kinds of conflicts that can resonate with most audiences. The analysis of their use of healing elements can serve as a reference or a basis for innovation. In terms of the application of healing style media, it is evident that healing style media can be a source of healing for people in real life. For example, one reader commented after reading *Rushan, Gushu and Me* that the rich knowledge of psychotherapy in the novel makes him or her interested in psychology and that he or she finds the way the book deals with relationship crises useful. There are also some readers who commented that the healing power of tea and music in the novel is very inspiring to them.

Finally, the emergence of various healing style media is not a simple coincidence. Although many factors contributed to the rise of healing style, behind the core problem that the healing style is trying to cure lies the dilemma of post-industrial society, at least in East Asia. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore possible solutions for the collective crises. This thesis

reveals that these crises reflected in healing style media exist in the real lives of most Chinese people today. The popularity of these healing style media is an indication of the need for these crises to be addressed. Although the power of one style and multiple media is limited in the face of the collective dilemmas arising from social processes, its presence can, to a certain extent, make people aware of the problems of their present environment and reflect on these issues, which is an important prerequisite for finding solutions.

### **Limitations of This Study**

In terms of literature review, due to the author's lack of access and language skills to search and analyze Japanese literature materials, the scope of coverage is limited to research materials in English and Chinese languages. The views of several Japanese critics on healing style cited in literature review are derived from the books of English scholars.

As for the selection of materials for analysis, due to space limitations, this thesis only analyzes two forms of healing style media in China, healing style novels and healing style anime, with only one representative of each type selected for in-depth analysis. The thesis does not analyze more forms of healing style media such as healing variety shows and healing picture books.

With regard to the main research questions, since the healing style media has only been around in China for a decade or so, and research on Chinese healing style media is at a start-up stage, this thesis focuses on how the healing style media responds to real-life problems and how healing is presented, rather than how healing style novels function for readers or how healing style anime affects viewers. Therefore, this thesis only uses readers' and viewers'

comments and the theory of bibliotherapy to support the application of the healing style media but lacks richer and more diverse real-life evidence.

In the third chapter, when analyzing the healing style novel *Rushan, Gushu and Me*, one of the research materials underlying this study, the promotion of specific goods by the healing style media is mentioned. For example, the musical instrument, singing bowls and various teas used for healing appear frequently in the healing process of the characters in the novel. The appendix of the novel contains a tea menu that introduces 10 types of teas to the reader. While Su Hei did not launch a dedicated sales channel for these ten types of tea, three fee-based events hosted by her to experience the healing power of the teas in the novel were promoted on the novel's Facebook page.<sup>39</sup> The length of these experiential activities ranged from three hours to six hours. A fee ranging from HK\$200 to HK\$1,160 is charged for attending the different sessions. The author, Su Hei also supervised the production of the singing bowls used for healing in the novel and is available for sale online.<sup>40</sup> The price of a singing bowl shown on the webpage is HK\$1,680. Combined with the healing style media's concern for the collective crisis facing Chinese people and the presentation of beautiful natural environments, delicious food, and other elements that cater to the needs of readers or viewers, as analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4, it is clear that the creators of healing style media know what their target audiences want and cater to them intentionally or unintentionally. Even though their intention to heal is positive, civic-minded and responsible, the singing bowl, tea therapy events, music albums, etc.

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<sup>39</sup> The links to the promotional pages for these three activities contain detailed information on the time, location, cost and schedule of the events:

1. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1411631505564692/?ref=newsfeed>.
2. <https://www.facebook.com/events/245403665977080/?ref=newsfeed>.
3. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1867065390288408/?ref=newsfeed>. Accessed July 22, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Here is the link to buy the singing bowl: <https://shop.fairys.co/products/xsuei-singingbowl>.

that are derived from the healing style media are not charity, free or low-cost, which shows that the creators' motives include (perhaps not intentionally) an opportunist mentality of catering to the market. At least that is what the commercialization of healing style media has resulted in. From this perspective, it can be argued that healing style media can be seen as an available merchandise for consumers in need. At this point, this thesis does not further investigate the intricate relationship between healing style and consumerism, as the focus of this study is on healing style and the evaluation of the two healing style media themselves. Nevertheless, the connection between healing style and consumerism would be an interesting topic for further research.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

For researchers interested in the application of healing style media, I suggest conducting fieldwork to collect data and strengthening the analysis of the data to make the findings more convincing. In addition, for studies on the application of healing style media to have a more convincing theoretical basis and evidence of practical use, it is recommended to start with only one media type as research material. This is because how different types of healing style media work with audiences vary greatly. Furthermore, the researcher should have a background of study in the relevant media, otherwise, the study will be difficult to carry out in-depth.

Researchers who are interested in the reasons for the emergence of healing style may have new findings by exploring the relationship between healing style and consumer culture in Japan. The literature review of this thesis provides an overview of existing research on this question in terms of commercialization, traumatic events and economic recession. However, the

popularity of the healing style and its promotion of a variety of healing tools, such as musical instruments in *Rushan Gushu and Me*, suggest its association with consumer culture and this may be traced back to before the emergence of the healing style in Japan.

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## Appendix

### List of Protagonists of *Rushan, Gushu and Me*

#### Asagi Yuan

A psychiatrist. Her mother, Yuan is Chinese and her father, Asagi is Japanese. They did not marry and separated when Asagi was six years old. Asagi always wish she could have different parents and a happy family

#### Gushu

A hairdresser and tea artist. Asagi's boyfriend. They establish Asagi & Tree Studio together. His Chinese name, Gushu means old tree and his Icelandic name, Te means tea

#### Rushan Bai

A cardiologist. Asagi's ex-boyfriend. He brings Asagi a lot of emotional suffering

#### Angel

One of the healees in Asagi & Tree Studio

#### Lucy

One of the healees in Asagi & Tree Studio