论 文 题 目

An Interpretation of Protagonist John's Cultural Identity in

Boyhood **and** ***Youth*** **from Spatial Criticism**

从空间批评解读《男孩》和《青春》中主人公

约翰的文化身份

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An Interpretation of Protagonist John's Cultural Identity in *Boyhood* and *Youth* from Spatial Criticism

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ABSTRACT

John Maxwell Coetzee is one of the most eminent representatives in the 20th century South African immigrant writers. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003. The complexity of realistic environment in South Africa and diasporic growth experiences make Coetzee stand on the edge of cultural identity all the time. Coetzee's works are immersed with reflections and critiques of superficial morality and harsh rationalism in western countries. His autobiographical novels, *Boyhood* and *Youth* are two independent but correlated works. The former portrays the protagonist John's childhood life in South Africa while the latter is about his journey of seeking root in England after he graduated from university.

With Henri Lefebvre's spatial criticism and Stuart Hall's cultural identity as theoretical framework, this paper interprets the leading character's cultural identity problems in two works from physical space, social space and individual space. Lefebvre holds that the spaces are full of social and cultural implications, which influence the individual's thoughts and behaviors. Hall proposes that cultural identity changes dynamically and constantly in diasporic experiences of immigrants. In physical space, through analyzing the transformation of natural geographical landscape, the thesis reveals that John can neither get rid of the fetters of South Africa native culture nor integrate into the marginalized situation of England. In social space, through expounding John's family, school and working space, the thesis elaborates his difficult time of identity anxiety to predicament then to identity pursuit. Individual space mainly illustrates John's personality and psychological changes. Because of the denial of his Afrikaans cultural identity, John spent a taciturn and depressive childhood. In youth,

John's alienation and diasporic state disillusioned him about seeking English cultural identity journey.

This paper aims to provide a new perspective for studying of Coetzee's two autobiographical novels by interpreting *Boyhood* and *Youth* from spatial criticism. Through analysis of three spatial dimensions that John has experienced, this paper explores the effect of space in shaping individuals and cultural identity, and demonstrates the significance of spatial criticism in literary works. Besides, through delving into John's identity-seeking journey from South Africa to England, the writer of this thesis expresses the concern about the living in a marginalized condition in post-colonial society, and re-examine the cultural identity of the imperial diasporic intellectuals at the same time.

KEY WORDS: *Boyhood*, *Youth*, spatial criticism, cultural identity

摘要

约翰·马克斯韦尔·库切是南非 20 世纪移民作家中最杰出的代表之一。他于 2003 年获得诺贝尔文学奖。南非复杂的现实环境和流散的成长经历使库切始终处于文化身份的边缘地带。库切的小说创作充满了对西方浅薄的道德观和残酷的理性主义的反思与批判。他的自传体小说《男孩》和《青春》是两部各自独立而又互相关联的作品。前者描写了主人公约翰在南非的孩童生活，后者是关于他大学毕业后在英国的寻根之旅。

以亨利·列斐伏尔的空间批评和斯图亚特·霍尔的文化身份为理论框架，本文从物理空间，社会空间和个体空间三个方面解读两部作品中主人公的文化身份问题。列斐伏尔认为充满社会和文化蕴含的空间影响着个体的思想和行为，霍尔提出文化身份是流动的，在移民流散经历中不断变化。在物理空间中，通过分析自然地理景观的转换，本文揭示了约翰既无法摆脱南非本土文化的束缚，又无法融入英国的边缘化处境。在社会空间中，通过阐述约翰所处的家庭，学校和工作空间，说明了他从身份焦虑到困境再到身份追寻的艰难时光。个体空间主要表明了约翰个性和心理的变化。由于对阿非利堪文化身份的否定，童年时代的约翰处于沉默，压抑自我。步入青年时代，约翰自身的疏离气质和流散状态也使他的英国寻根之旅幻灭。

本论文通过从空间批评解读《男孩》和《青春》，旨在为研读库切的这两部自传体小说提供一个新的研究视角。通过对约翰所经历的三个空间维度的分析，本论文探讨了空间对个体的塑造作用和对文化身份的影响，说明了空间批评在文学作品中的重要意义。此外，论文作者通过研究约翰从南非到英国的身份追寻之旅，表达了对后殖民社会中边缘人物生活状态的关注，同时重新审视了帝国流散知识分子的文化身份。

关键词：《男孩》；《青春》；空间批评；文化身份

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Introduction to the Author and Works

John Maxwell Coetzee (1940-) is a South African-born novelist, essayist, linguist and translator. He migrated to Australia in 2002 and became an Australian citizen in 2006. J. M. Coetzee together with Nadine Gordimer and André Brink are recognized as three of South Africa's most prominent white writers, all of them with definite anti-apartheid commitment. As a white immigrant offspring from African colonial country, Coetzee has more anxiety about his cultural identity than other intellectuals and he suffers much pain in identification. As Laura Wright says that "[i]n the domain of Afrikaner, Coetzee is an 'Outsider' who has his own distinctive orientation" (Wright 1).

On February 9th 1940, John Maxwell Coetzee was born in an Afrikaner family in Cape Town, South Africa. His mother was a schoolteacher who was a descendant of Dutch, German and Polish immigrants. His father was a government employee who was descended from early Dutch immigrants. Coetzee's childhood in Cape Town was dominated by cultural conflicts. He received bilingual education from an early age and had a good command of Afrikaans and English. However, he regarded English as his mother tongue influenced by family atmosphere.

In 1948, Coetzee's family moved to Worcester owing to his father's employment in government. Coetzee grew up during the most serious apartheid period in South Africa, where violent conflicts and bloody events happened frequently in his childhood. Coetzee felt social and psychological misfits with surroundings no matter at home or

school.

In 1960, Coetzee studied mathematics and English at the University of Cape Town and received his Bachelor of Arts with honours. However, he could not find the belongingness as an Afrikaner because he is educated by English manners in the complex context of South Africa.

In 1962, Coetzee went to UK and worked as a computer programmer for IBM in London and he was awarded a Master of Arts degree. However, he could not integrate into British mainstream society because of his colonial background. This was also a period when Coetzee pursued his British identity and thought about British culture.

In 1965, Coetzee relocated to the US and received his doctorate. He began to teach English literature at the State University of New York until 1971. However, he could not seek permanent residence in America due to his involvement in Anti-Vietnam War Parade. In 1972, Coetzee returned to South Africa and taught at University of Cape Town. He migrated to Australia in 2002 and took office in Adelaide University.

It was rather late when Coetzee's first novel *Dusk Lands* published in 1974, but the success of the novel won him a lot of reputations and recognition. Although Coetzee was not a prolific writer, his works have been honoured with numerous awards in his literary career. He was the first writer to be awarded the Booker Prize twice: first for *Life and Times of Michael K* in 1983, and again for *Disgrace* in 1999. He was also a three times winner of the CAN Prize. The most important is his Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003 for his "well-crafted composition, pregnant dialogue and analytical brilliance" (Wen 183). Besides, Coetzee's autobiographical trilogy: *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002), and *Summertime* (2009) has great value in understanding his works. And the former two will be analyzed in this thesis.

Coetzee oppugns the conservative literary mode and subverts the inexorable correlation between historical facts and literary creation as well as defends ethical responsibility by his own literature practices. He is good at reflecting his inner voice as the weapon to challenge authority and deconstruct hegemony. Coetzee not only cares about the contemporary social problems of South Africa, but also concerns about

identity authentication of individual. Most of Coetzee's works mainly depicts people's lives under apartheid. He precisely portrays the innate characters under the false mask and ruthlessly castigates the cruel rationalism and hypocritical morals of western civilization. But at the crucial moment, the characters in Coetzee's works are all recoil in fear, which becomes a sort of resistance pattern to violence in the exploration of human weakness.

As the winner of Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003, Coetzee connects the anti-colonial theme with post-modern speech freedom so as to produce a series of stories. At the same time, Coetzee's creation benefits from western techniques and modes to demonstrate the history and present life of South Africans. It shows that Coetzee has united the literature of South Africa and western countries and facilitated to a new entirety. In brief, Coetzee's marginality in Africa and overseas gave him free thinking and writing space. His individualized writing style makes his works a literary treasure, which deserves further studying and thinking.

John Maxwell Coetzee is the full name of the author, the protagonist is John Coetzee in his two autobiographical novels: *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* and *Youth*: *Scenes from Provincial Life II*. The two works respectively published in 1997 and in 2002. There is a clearly connection with them in terms of publication date and the title as well as content of works: firstly, the writer has the same name as the protagonist John in works; secondly, the writer has the similar cultural settings and growth experiences to the protagonist; thirdly, the two memoirs continuity narrates John's growth trajectory. In order to distinguish the writer and the fictional figure, Coetzee represents the writer and John represents character in two works.

Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life gives an account of John's family life and school life in South Africa from about eight to thirteen years old (1948-1953), which is a true record of writer's childhood experiences and spiritual world. Although John was born in an Afrikaans family in South Africa, yet he grew up in an English-speaking family and his identity problem always troubled him. Besides, in this period, the injustice inter-racial relationship in South Africa also became an important context in

the memoir. Coetzee's portrayal of protagonist John's inner world is quite abundant, which implies John's all sorts of struggles and discomforts before his self-awareness completely mature. With regard to John, the meaning of childhood life not only lies in physiological growth, but also the establishment of thought, conception and value orientation. John has his own thinking norms and inner demands. We can catch sight of a lonely, sensitive and depressed boy who presents various contradictions when he gets along with parents and classmates.

Youth: *Scenes from Provincial Life II* is a work that according to writer's re-examination and literary exploration from South Africa to Britain between age nineteen to twenty-four. There are twenty chapters but no stirring story plots. The basic unit of work consists of many scenes, which are connected by specific spaces instead of continuous time. The image of protagonist John is constructed by spaces and conversely, spatial change promotes his identity transformation. As a young man who is full of artistic temperament, John leaves for London to pursue his literary dream because his inability to tolerate the domestic apartheid and the new nationalism in South Africa. John loves English poetry and is eager for a new cultural identity in England. However, it ends with the lack of passion and loss of creativity in his literary talent. In London, love is the only way to get rid of anxiety and gain self-consolation for him because he insists that creativity always comes along with sexuality, but it turns out to be impossible. Therefore, no matter how hard John tries, he is still unable to escape the identity of "white South Africans". Wherever young John goes, he can not find a true sense of belonging. He is always in a "foreign country" whether in South Africa or Europe.

The two memoirs show us a South African society that we are not familiar with. Coetzee grows up in such a social background, which is full of contradictions and conflicts. There are plenty of descriptions about Coetzee's inner choices and struggles between dual cultural identities. *Boyhood* and *Youth* narrate the process of doubts and failures in John's identity seeking, which ultimately degenerates into a dual otherness. In the autobiographical novels, John's pursuit and thinking of identity also reveals his

prudent rebellion and introspection, which is reflected in John's critical thinking of British cultural life and his grim analysis to himself.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters and the content of each chapter as follows:

Chapter one firstly gives a brief introduction to J.M.Coetzee from the perspective of life experiences, works and awards, personal writing style and influences to world literary. Besides, there is an introduction to his works *Boyhood* and *Youth* from the angles of content and comment. Secondly, the structure of the thesis is also included in this chapter.

Chapter two is the literature review about J. M. Coetzee and his *Boyhood* and *Youth* at home and abroad.

Chapter three is about the theoretical foundation. It consists of two parts: the first part is the concept and development of space and spatial criticism; the second part is four attributes of spatial criticism that are related to this thesis.

Chapter four to Chapter six is main argument of this thesis. Chapter four focuses on John's cultural identity problems with the shift of physical space, including rejection of Afrikaans identity in South Africa and incompatible with English identity in England. It analyzes the closed and impoverished living environment in South Africa that makes a distinctive contrast with open and advanced living condition in England. Although John was born in South Africa, his ardently love for British culture, education and language all makes him a convoluted understanding to his identity. Chapter five digs out John's cultural identity problems in social space. Firstly, it analyzes John's repressive emotion to his parents and the identity anxiety in family space. Secondly, it explores John's student-hood and adolescent experiences together with his identity dilemma in school space. Thirdly, it inquires John's changeable jobs and his identity pursuit process in working space. Chapter six dwells on John's cultural identity

problems in individual space. John presents two vivid individual spaces in his growth process: one is the silent and depressive individual in his childhood; the other is disillusionment individual in his youth, which both reflect John's futile quest of his cultural identity.

Chapter seven summarizes the thesis and gives a conclusion to the thesis. This chapter illustrates John's dual cultural identity because of his diasporic experiences in modern society.

1.3 Significance of the Study

As the winner of the 2003 Nobel Prize in literature, there is no doubt that John Maxwell Coetzee is one of the most eminent authors in the 20th century. But he is rarely known by the public for living a very tranquil and prudent life and seldom accepting media interviews. So the best and easiest way to understand him is reading his autobiographical novel. Comparing with his other renowned works, the study on *Boyhood* and *Youth* in China is still insufficient and in the initial stage. Actually, these two works have an important place that elucidates writer's growth process. The protagonist John in two books is an immigrant of multiple spaces and cultures and he is in a state of wandering and in a journey of seeking. Except for the background and plot, the structure of *Boyhood* and *Youth* are infused with multiple spaces. According to statement above, it is appropriate and practicable to interpret Coetzee's works in spatial criticism.

In exploring the protagonist John's cultural identity of the spatial experiences in *Boyhood* and *Youth*, this paper draws on spatial criticism like Henri Lefebvre's classification of three kinds of space and Mike Crang's *Cultural Geography*. Besides, Stuart Hall's cultural identity and diaspora will be applied. Although those critics' ideas diverse greatly, they all believe in natural, social, cultural and identity attribute and significance in spaces. For immigrants who are always in diaspora, cultural identity's transformation and formation are complicatedly interwoven with spaces and are always

flexible. The same is particularly true of John in England. The space transference and his spatial activities will unavoidably bring about the cultural conflicts and tensions and thus influence his cultural identity.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

So far, Coetzee has published 14 novels and 6 collections of critical essays. As a classic writer, Coetzee's works have rich connotations that can be continuously excavated. The foreign and domestic critics have made some achievements in Coetzee's research.

2.1 Overseas Study on Coetzee's Works

The study of Coetzee and his works abroad started early and the research perspectives were diversified. Since the publication of Coetzee's first book in 1974, dozens of introductory articles and reviews have been published overseas every year, and there are many related monographs. When Coetzee won the Booker Prize in 1983, his literary reputation increased greatly. His novels have also become a hot topic of literary criticism and many research monographs and collections about Coetzee have appeared successively.

In the 1980s, Teresa Dovey's *The Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* firstly appears to explore the allegorical writing from the perspective of post-structuralism in Coetzee's works. Allen Richard Penner's *Countries of the Mind: The Fiction of J.M. Coetzee* analyzes the spiritual pursuit in Coetzee's works.

After the 1990s, with the enhancement of Coetzee's international influence, more

and more attention has been paid to his works, and more research monographs have appeared. Susan Gallaher's *A Story of South Africa: J. M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context* puts Coetzee's fiction in the history and politics of South Africa, and analyses Coetzee's reflection on South Africa's history, language and power. David Attwell's *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* explores the relationship between literature and politics in Coetzee's novels. He believes that there is a distinct embodiment of political responsibility in Coetzee's novels and analyses the author's political views and positions behind his works. Sue Kossew's *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee* carefully selects 16 research articles, which deeply interprets the different issues of literature and politics, sex and text, novel and autobiography, feminist perspective and novel creation reflected in Coetzee's novels.

After entering the 21st century, Coetzee's many new works of different styles have been published one after another. In addition to the enormous influence of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003, the research on Coetzee by the critics is more ample. In 2004, two important experts Derek Attridge and Jane Poyner separately published *J.M. Coetzee and Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* and *J.M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*. The former focuses on the ethical issues in Coetzee's works, while the latter pays attention to the moral responsibility of intellectuals. In 2006, Laura Wright published *Writing Out of All the Camps:J.M.Coetzee's Narratives of Displacement*, which combines Coetzee's artistic characteristics with his ideological research. Wright interprets the narrative of Coetzee's novels into the identification to "the other" of being marginalized. In Coetzee's novels: the blacks are the other the whites, women are the other of men, animals are the other of human beings. Coetzee realizes transposition through imagination as well as understands and respects the existence of these people and their equal subjectivity. In 2009, William McDonald published *Encountering Disgrace: Reading and Teaching Coetzee's Novel.* This book is a collection of papers written by William and his students within three years' study of Coetzee's *Disgrace*. It carefully analyzes the topics of history, rape, race, animals, morality and so on.

Generally speaking, the research on Coetzee in these monographs mainly focuses on the following aspects: first of all, they show the historical interpretations of Coetzee's works; second, they explore the ideological and practical significance of Coetzee's works from the perspective of post-colonial theory, which is also the central point of previous studies; third, comparing Coetzee with other writers in terms of ideology and art. In addition, there is a part of the analysis of Coetzee's creative characteristics from the perspective of post-modern writing and text narrative.

2.2 Domestic Study on Coetzee's Works

In China, Coetzee is relatively unfamiliar before he obtained the Nobel Prize in Literature. From the information the writer found that the earliest domestic research about Coetzee is in *Disgrace.* However, after winning the Nobel Prize in 2003, Coetzee has attracted extensive attention from Chinese academia. In March 2018, the writer retrieved more than 600 articles related to Coetzee, including general newspapers and magazines, general comments, doctoral dissertations and important monographs. From the quantitative point of view, the domestic research results of Coetzee are very solid and involve multiple aspects.

According to analysis, the comments on Coetzee and his works can be roughly divided into the following categories. The first is to study the reflection on apartheid and post-apartheid era in Coetzee's works and the deconstruction of colonial discourse from the perspective of South Africa's history and culture. For instance, Duan Feng's *An Exploration of Coetzee's Four Open and Dialogic Fiction Narratives* depicts the common living conditions of human beings reflected in the works starting from many problems in South Africa in the post-apartheid era. Gao Wenhui's *Coetzee in Post-colonial Cultural Context* analyzes the decline of the dominant status of white South Africans and the confusion of losing their identity from the post-colonial perspective. Lan Shoutin's *Human's Delimma and Salvation* reveals the positioning of social roles in South Africa's post-apartheid era and the psychological trauma caused by

colonialism with the narrative discourse of post-colonialism. This kind of research has high academic value, and is an important reference and basis for this paper. The second kind of research mainly involves Coetzee's post-modern narrative strategy. Gao Wenhui's *Coetzee's Autobiography and Autobiographical writing* analyses Coetzee's text narrative strategy. The third category is the study of diaspora identity writing. Researchers pay attention to Coetzee's special personal experience and analyze his works from the identity ambiguity in the study of diaspora identity writing. Cai Shengqin's *Island Consciousness: The Writing Situation of Imperial Diaspora Intellectuals* carries out the research of Coetzee's works on the basis of this argument. Fourthly, there are some researches use trauma theory to explore the trauma theme in Coetzee's works from perspective of "the other" in his early and middle works, which starts from the unique historical and cultural context of South Africa. Shi Yunlong's *The Multiple Dimensions of "the Other" in Coetzee's Novels* compares the identity crisis and survival dilemma of the whites and the blacks in South Africa and explores the problems brought by historical trauma.

Generally speaking, the researches achievements are increasing year by year at home and they are mainly embodied in the following dimensions: with regard to research methods, it is mainly from the post-colonial theory such as historical problems, subjectivity and discourse of power. As for the research contents, the scholars gave relations between Coetzee's works and South African racial discrimination in history as well as postcolonial context. These studies deepen the understanding of Coetzee's works; meanwhile, there is still quite a large space for interpretation of his *Boyhood* and *Youth*. For example, Coetzee's spatial thoughts, philosophical thoughts, morality and religious views.

2.3 Studies on Coetzee's *Boyhood* and *Youth*

Comparing with other famous works, there is a gap of studying Coetzee's *Boyhood* and *Youth* whether in terms of the number or the theme, but it is still worth exploring.

In the first place, introductory books have appeared in newspapers and journals since the publication of *Boyhood* and *Youth*. For instance, Sue Kossew's paper *"Writing Self as Other: J. M. Coetzee's Life Writing in Scenes from Provincial Life (2011)"* analyzes Coetzee's autobiographical trilogy and the unique concept of autobiography type.

In the second place, scholars approach *Boyhood* and *Youth* from the perspective of historicity since Coetzee is inevitably involved in the historical context of South Africa. Giverholt believes that *Youth* represents a kind of trial that Coetzee explores how personal idea is related to the history. *"The Confessions of J.M. Coetzee: Truth and Absolution in Boyhood, Youth, and Disgrace"* by Tim McIntyre puts forward that for Coetzee writing confession is a method to the way of truth. Coad David's *"Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life"* points out Coetzee's childhood life and explains the embarrassing situation of Coetzee as a mainlander.

In the third place, narrative study is an important aspect for researchers. Maragret Lenta firstly points out that it is a mistake to regard *Boyhood* and *Youth* as novels but not autobiographical fiction. McIntyre discusses the problem of confession in Coetzee's *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Disgrace*, indicating that for Coetzee, writing as confession is a way to approach truth. Furthermore, other researches on *Boyhood* and *Youth* are noticeable, including ecological criticism, subjectivity and so on. These monographs and paper collections systematically summarize the research on Coetzee in the international critics and provide readers with valuable research materials.

Overall, studies on Coetzee and his works increase dramatically after he won the Nobel Prize. However, previous researches on *Boyhood* and *Youth* are less involved. Besides, the spatial criticism is more widely applied to analysis of literary works, which can give a new perspective to understand works. Therefore, on the basis of previous studies, this paper provides a new perspective to appreciate *Boyhood* and *Youth*. It explores the spatial characteristics embodied in Coetzee's *Boyhood* and *Youth* and expresses the journey of protagonist's quest for cultural identity by analysis of physical space, social space and individual space.

Chapter Three

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Western literary theories experience transformation for many times, in which the spatial turn is one of the most important features in post-modern literary thought. In 1945, Joseph Frank published *Spatial Form in Modern Literature*, which marked the spatial turn in literature and theorists began to focus on "spatiality" in literary works. Many scholars transferred their attention to space and spatial study became a research center. The spatial study has strong theoretical characteristics that involve the study of identity, race, history, discourse. Wolfreys points out "[t]he focus on space has from different fields come into literary field, such as post-colonial criticism, feminist criticism, cultural study" (Wolfreys 181).

3.1 The Concept and Development of Space and Spatial Criticism

Human beings exist in the fundamental frame-structure of time and space, which are two significant dimensions of people's understanding of the entire world. Only in terms of time and space can we imagine something really exists. However, the consciousness of time is relatively stronger than space in history of human thought's development. Every discipline inevitably uses historical narrative which takes time as an implicit thinking mode. The emphasis on time generally examines the linear development and inherent law of things, forming a theoretical paradigm that characterized by diachronic and historicization. Contrarily, space tends to be simple, abstract and empty in traditional philosophical thought, that is, metaphysical. In the

etymological sense, space can be traced back to the Latin word "spatium", which means distances or intermission between two isolated objects. According to Foucault, space was treated as "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (Foucault 264). It emphasizes the inherent homogeneity and unavoidably enters into the dual opposition mode of subjectivity and objectivity, spirit and material, reason and perception. Space is always covered in traditional philosophical perspective, which influenced by grand narrative of metaphysics and historicism.

The American professor Joseph Frank published *Spatial Form in Modern Literature* in *Suwannee Review* in 1945, and put forward the theory of spatial form. In his opinion, spatial form means in the literary creation the writers change the traditional linear static narration and change the natural time process, and by doing so, writers could get the synchronic spatial effects which are difficult for the linear narration in the works. Banishing the traditional idea of over-emphasizing the importance of time, spatial turn comes into being in the contemporary literary theory in the 1980s. Based on the spatial turn, spatial criticism becomes the main parts of the contemporary critical theory. Spatial criticism originates from the development of cultural geography, which absorbs the theories of post-modern cultural research, identity and feminism. Cultural geography deconstructs the original conception of space-time and changes its focus from landscape research to space-based cultural research, and forms a complete and systematic post-modern criticism method to study the characteristics of space culture.

3.2 The Basic Attributes of Spatial Criticism

With great connotation, spatial criticism provides a new view for critics to analyze literary works. Besides, it also inspires writers to pay attention to the space in works. There are four basic attributes in Spatial Criticism: the natural attribute, the social attribute, the cultural attribute and the identity attribute.

3.2.1 The natural attribute of spatial criticism

In traditional literary study, more attention is paid to its natural attribute—landscape. Landscape is the geographical environment and the essential factor of constructing story plot in literary works. Landscape is often expressed as place, scene or "container" in a work. Family houses, palace buildings and pastoral landscape in real life can be artificially endowed with symbolic significance. The landscape in literary works can be divided into material landscape and non-material landscape. Material landscape is the place and shape that people feel, such as cities, countrysides and buildings. Non-material landscape mainly includes ideologies, customs, religions and political factors. These landscapes as spatial structure tightly associates with our life. Through analyzing the spatial pattern of geographical landscape and the practice of creating this pattern, we can understand the concept of life permeated in the landscape space.

American urban theorist Edward. W. Soja and British scholar Mike Crang deal with the nature of space from the perspective of post-modernism. Soja studies the physical space as a material production in his work *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Place*. Mike Crang states the relationship between literature and its outside world in *Cultural Geography*. He believes that literary landscape should be based on the combination of literature and landscape rather than on literature as an isolated mirror to reflect the world. In addition, Crang also deeply discusses the relationship between literature and geographical landscape. In his view, literary geography is the combination of literature and geography. Literature is a part of real world instead of simply reflecting outside world. Literary works change the geographical landscape in our real life, in which values and cultural traditions also affect performance methods of geographical landscape in literature. "In literary works, social values and ideologies exert their influence by means of geographical category" (Yang 77).

Therefore, the literary works not only vividly portray the geographical landscape but also pay attention to abstract meaning and regard landscape as a symbolic system of social value and ideology. It reveals people's different approaches to understanding the world.

3.2.2 The social attribute of spatial criticism

The social attribute of spatial criticism means that space is a collection of social relations such as ideologies, values and historical cultures. In traditional literary criticism, space is considered as an objective form of material existence and a scene of landscape or character development that carries story content. Spatial criticism goes beyond the landscape itself to focus on exploring the social attribute of space.

The representative of social space is French scholar Henri Lefebvre. He is a Marxist, a philosopher, and the leading figure who specializes in spatial theory. Henri Lefebvre firstly puts forward that space is a way of human existence so that space no longer confines to nature and begins to enter the field of social, political and philosophical disciplines. In 1974, Lefebvre published his monograph *The Production of Space* translated by Donald Nicholso-Smith and met English world in 1991. This book is the most requested book that emphasizes the significance of social space. It keeps on the spatial turn of humanities and social sciences. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre proposes the famous trinity of space, that is:

> [T]he fields we are concerned with are: first, the physical-nature, the Cosmos; second, the mental including logical and formal abstraction; and thirdly, the social. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and Utopias. (Lefebvre 11-12)

Lefebvre's view highlights the initiative of space itself, which is a collection of

various social relations and elements. It is not only the product of society, but also involved in social production.

Starting from the social attribute of spatial criticism, Lefebvre puts forward a new spatial interpretation model, which is the kernel of his spatial theory—spatial triad. He considers that any space dialectically composes of three interrelated spaces: spatial practice, representation of space and representational space. Spatial practice is a concrete, social productive and experienced space, "which embraces production and reproduction, and particular location and spatial set characteristic of each social formation" (Lefebvre 33). Spatial practice can be perceived by human beings. Representation of space refers to a specific way of conceiving space. It is a conceptual space, which combines artistic spirit with scientific thought for scientists, designers, archaeologists, politicians and social engineers. All of the experts imagine that the realistic existence and perceptive content as the space of conception. Representation of space usually tightly associated with a certain social relationship. It controls and influences people's writing and speaking, and then dominates the production of spatial knowledge. Representational space is "the space of embodied individual's cultural experience and the signs, images, forms and symbols that constitute it" (Wegner 182). Representational space refers to the space with symbolic meaning or cultural meaning in a particular society.

In short, Lefebvre has greatly stressed the sociological significance of space and regained its ontological status based on Marx's theory. He laid a foundation for further development and multiple dimensional researches into spatial criticism.

3.2.3 The cultural attribute of spatial criticism

Spatial criticism theory holds that space is the collection of various social relations in literary works that culture is the centre of this collection. Since the second half of the 20th century, space was no longer a passive and static natural attribute, but regarded as

the energy for cultural construction to emphasize the profound cultural significance. Then, space theory combined with cultural study and cultural attribute became the focus of spatial criticism.

The representatives of this period are Mike Crang and American scholar Philip Wegner. In *Cultural Geography*, Mike Crang focuses on the cultural connotation of geographical landscape and spatial research from the perspective of cultural orientation. Crang emphasizes that geographic landscape is not only the place where stories happen, but also the author's understanding of society and life. Social ideologies and people's values will be preserved and consolidated through geographic landscape. Crang further points out that geographical landscape is the product of people's living ability in practice which is consistent with their culture. Therefore, geographic landscape is a symbolic system with ideologies and values. Wegner firstly puts forward the concept of spatial criticism in literature in his essay *Spatial Criticism: Critical Geography, Space, Place and Textuality*. He believes that the attention to space has from various perspectives entered literary studies, such as post-colonialism and feminism. Wegner also calls for to interpret literary works in a more comprehensive attitude and multi-dimensional perspective. Only in this way can we gain a richer understanding of the complexity and originality of the global space in which we live today.

In short, culture is regarded as root of spatial criticism. "It emphasizes the various relations of human with society, politics, and economics. We can spatialize cultural study through regarding culture is spatial metaphor such as the media, the level and the sphere" (Li 79). The cultural attribute of spatial criticism lays emphasis on deep cultural meaning that is reflected by literary works as a huge spatial metaphor.

3.2.4 The identity attribute of spatial criticism

Spatial criticism also absorbs many important postmodern theories in its later development and identity is one of them. Identity is an important aspect in study of

western literature and culture. Identity can be divided into individual identity, collective identity, self-identity and social identity. "In the identifying process of an individual and a specific culture, the power of cultural agency renders the individual to participate positively or passively into the cultural practices and ultimately forge one's identity" (Tao 465). Therefore, the basic concept is the confirmation of an individual in a specific social culture.

It is worth noting that while concerning with space from cultural perspective, Crang and Wegner also integrate identification theory and subjectivity into the study of space. They establish the relationship between the concepts of identity and geographical space. Crang points out that we can use spatial shorthand method to summarize other groups' characteristics, which is, defining them according to the place where they live because space plays a crucial role in defining other groups. In the process of being called "otherization", the characteristics of "ego" and "otherness" are established in an unequal way. Therefore, Crang puts forward the concept of "other space" (Yang 77).

In conclusion, spatial criticism has already entered literary research, such as post-colonialism, feminism, gender criticism, popular culture and style research. Literary spatial criticism also develops in the multi-dimensional perspective of space theory and anthropology, geography, architecture and other interdisciplinary disciplines. It is constantly unfolding in the interactive interpretation of literary research practice and space theory, providing a new horizon and theoretical growth point for literary research. However, the process of literary spatial turn has not finished, it is still in a continuous and open stage which need to explore more literary practices and theories.

Chapter Four

JOHN'S CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH THE SHIFT OF PHYSICAL SPACE

"Physical space reveals through the interpretation of its space. It can be observed and analyzed in architecture, city planning, actual designs of routes and localities, in the organization of everyday life and urban reality" (Lefebvre 33). Physical space lays particular emphasis on objectivity and materiality, which is characters' living space in the novel and the external expression of the emotional world. It provides a regional place for an occurrence and development of a story. Spatial criticism attaches great importance to deeper and wider significance of physical space, and regards it as a symbolic system that contains social relations and individual consciousness. Therefore, physical space is considered not only as a sort of natural attribute, which is used to describe such living space as material landscape, but also as an analyzable text that can explore the abstract meaning of the relationship between man and nature.

Coetzee's works are rich in physical space elements, involving many specific landscapes, scenes and locations. For example, *Boyhood* and *Youth* can be regarded as journey novels in which the protagonist John goes through multiple places in quest of his own ideal cultural identity with the transference of physical spaces. *Boyhood* and *Youth* present two dissimilar geographic pictures: closed and backward South Africa in the era of apartheid and the post-war rapid economic development and advanced England. South Africa has witnessed John's bewilderment and confusion. He is an outsider in Worcester and a marginal person in Cape Town. England, especially in London, which shows John's isolation and despondency in his adolescence. Whichever physical space John survives in, he only feels loneliness and hopelessness around him

rather than belongingness. This chapter aims to investigate John's cultural identity problems with the shift of physical space.

4.1 The Rejection of Afrikaans Identity in South Africa

As a spatial structure, natural landscape closely relates to people's life in literary works. Mike Crang points out that novel as a literary form has inherent geographical attribute. The fictional word consists of location and background, place and boundary, vision and horizon. The characters in the novel occupy different geographies and spaces. Each novel may provide a different form of perceptual knowledge and systematic understanding of geographical information in a certain area. However, literary works not simply provide a vivid description of the geographical landscape, but can reveal people's world outlook and show different ways to understand the world. Therefore, the focus is to penetrate into the cultural landscape through the physical appearance of the physical space so that the landscape research can enter into the deep mentality connotation. *Boyhood* describes John's childhood experiences in South Africa where he rejects his Afrikaans identity because he is an outsider in Worcester and a marginal person in Cape Town. In the space transformation process, John is still relentlessly pursuing his literary dream and cultural identity, and striving to grow up after frustration and suffering from childishness.

4.1.1 An outsider in Worcester

Physical space is one of the most basic elements of human existence, which is what Henri Lefebvre called the representational space. Natural landscape has specific shape and creates an independent atmosphere for people's life. It enhances regional characteristics of the work and reveals the unique nature of the background as well as

the characteristics and causes of the heroes' human nature in the story. There are two significant locations of John's childhood life in Worcester and they will be described in details.

At the beginning of *Boyhood*, Coetzee delicately depicts the real life scene of Worcester in South Africa: The Johns live in a residential area outside Worcester City, where the house situates on a barren expanse of red earth, and the whole place is separated into small pieces by a wire fence. They build a shelter for poultry in the low-lying part of the yard where rain can hardly seep through the clay. The depression in the yard is full of water, and the stink of moving biogas is covered with the chicken nest. What is worse, "[T]here are ants in Worcester, flies, plagues of fleas…He has a ring of fleabites above his socks, and scabs where he has scratched. Some nights he cannot for the itching" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 2). John feels despaired in Worcester and longs to move out here.

John grows up in a nontraditional family which is vastly different from other normal households in education, lifestyle and religion. John can not identify with South African indigenous culture and reject Afrikaans racism power. Therefore, in townlet Worcester, John is an outsider with the lack of a sense of security and belonging.

The second noticeable place in *Boyhood* is Grandpa John's farm in Caru Basin—the Voelfontein (Bird-fountain) is one of the most attractive places in contrast to Worcester's complex and turbulent environment. Coetzee introduces the farm in a large number of words. Chapter eleven of the *Boyhood* is used to describe the environment of farm and his complex feelings about the farm, where he is delighted by hunting, slaughtering and festive parties. According to Afrikaners themselves, the natural, simple and self-sufficient life is comparable to the Hebraic life style recorded in the *Old Testament*.

Voelfontein on farm is the most desirable place where John wants to go when his life encounters bottlenecks. The quiet environment allows him to really relax and enjoy himself, only here can he put aside those confused, lonely and helpless experiences.

He loves each stone of it, each brush, each blade of grass, love the birds that give them their names, thousands of birds that as dusk fall together in the trees around the fountain, calling to each other, murmuring, ruffling their feathers, settles for the night. It's not conceivable that another person could love the farm as he does. (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 80)

Voelfontein is imbued with primitive pastoral scenes, the contrast between the tranquil and idyllic atmosphere there and the bustle of city could starker. John calls out to the farm and tries to get rid of everything that has bounded him to get a new life here. The most interesting part on farm is hunting. Only by hunting does he really know how big the farm is. He and his father are shocked when they had arrived at the junction of the Voelfontein and another farm. In John's imagination, Voelfontein itself is a kingdom, where a person can't experience its whole life and can never touch all of the grasses and trees here. It's not enough to pay such a pious heart to love Voelfontein no matter how much time it takes. John's deepest experience of Voelfontein is a summer when the farm looks immense in the dazzling sunshine. The mystery of Voelfontein lies in the singing of birds in his ears in a hot afternoon when the mirage appears on the distant horizon. In afternoon when everything seems to be drowsy in heat, Coetzee tiptoes out of the house and climbs up the hill, trying to outline a prosperous scene and his good wish.

Speaking of farm, John always hides a mysterious and sacred word in his heart: belonging. He longs for it to be his destiny and home. But he knows very well that Voelfontein does not belong to anyone. The farm is greater than any of them and will go to eternity. The farm is still alive when they all die and house collapse. In *Boyhood*, Coetzee describes his childhood life on Voelfontein farm and expresses his ambivalent feelings with exquisite writing: on the one hand, John loves the farm deeply in his heart and thinks that "[T]here is no place on earth he love more or can imagine loving more" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 79); on the other hand, John knows that "[H]e will never live there. The farm is not his home; he will never be more than a guest, an uneasy guest" (ibid). When it comes to people and things related to the farm, it seems that his feelings about the farm are very contradictory.

Through analyzing the text, there are three reasons for John's contradictory

experiences. Firstly, it roots in the ownership of farm. Although John's grandfather is the farm's legal owner, little John thinks that the farm should belong to Coloured family—Outa Jaap. Outa Jaap has been dead for a long time, but keen-natured John sees the truth behind it. The Johns like seasonal migrating swallows that did not stay for a long time on farm. The ownership of farm concerns the colonial history of South Africa. John's ancestors probably came to farm through the Great Trek movement in the 1930s, and the original owners of the farm were local residents who were colonized and enslaved. The anxieties and hedgerows that John experienced were not because the seemingly owner of the farm was not his father, but because the farm was fundamentally not part of his family in his mind. The seemingly calm farm life hides the cruel historical truth, which undoubtedly casts a shadow on little John's love for the farm. Secondly, it is for historical reason that little John is uncomfortable with the latent hierarchical order on farm. He feels embarrassment and uneasy when he sees the servants of Coloured people who serve the John family. Those Coloured people always seem to have to show that low-grade appearance in everything. For example, when Outa Jaap's granddaughter, Lientjie, meets John in the corridor, she must pretend to be invisible and John must pretend that she is not there. The hierarchy on farm is not only reflected in the Coloured races serving the John family, but also in their forbidden actions, such as Coloured people mustn't touch guns. These prohibitions make John can't enjoy the pleasure of farm while seeing the non-freedom of the Coloured ethnic groups. The abnormal human landscape also weakens John's attachment to farm. Thirdly, the ambiguous emotions also come from John's vague understanding of his identity. We can find many details in *Boyhood* that John thinks himself to be a "pseudo-Englishman." John claims that he doesn't belong to Afrikaans even though his surname and blood are Afrikaans, even though he can speak pure Afrikaans. At the same time, John finds that Afrikaners made him more skillful in real life, and he would be indignant when the British expressed contempt for Afrikaans. Little John clearly understands that although he knows everything about Britain, he could not pass the test to become a real Englishman. It can be seen that John is neither willing to accept his

Afrikaans identity, nor aware that he will never become an Englishman, such a suspending identity recognition causes John's contradictory perception of the farm. In his autobiography, John's complex and paradoxical emotional description of the farm is a mixture of his infinite love for the farm, the embarrassment caused by apartheid and his vague identity.

Voelfontein is John's beautiful wish for a new life. He hopes that he could face life positively and discover the beauty of life. Besides, he also hopes that he could get rid of the unpleasant shadows of the past and starts a new life. No matter where he is, he could not give up looking for the direction of happiness. In Voelfontein, cities, wars and hardships along the way seem to be forgotten, and here seems to be a space to escape oppression and endowed with expectations and personal feelings. Little John's emotional attachment to the farm is his desire to return to his transcendental homeland, while his alienation from the farm is a natural retreat when face of historical, political and identity issues. It is a transcendental expression of homelessness because he can not return to his desirable home.

In the privacy of John's heart, he dislikes the living environment of Worcester extremely and behaves like an outsider. Even his family has been to Cape Town, he just could not get rid of the fetters of South Africa. John's transcendental homelessness is not only the manifestation of the collective after experiencing great historical trauma, but also the spontaneous state of the individual after being stripped of the true life in modern society. It shows Coetzee's complex and distorted feelings towards his native South Africa, and highlights the identity dissociation and emotional dilemma in contemporary discrete intellectuals.

4.1.2 A marginal person in Cape Town

The geographical background starts with living environment in Worcester, where colonizers come to South Africa and amass fortune on farm just like Voelfontein. The

contemporary colonial posterities depart from farm in succession and seek their new domicile. As a colonial descendant who lives far from farm, John is immersed with grievance and becomes an outsider in Worcester; then in Cape Town, he is encompassed by tedious life and marginalized by falsity atmosphere. As John's main living environment, Cape Town can be seen more intuitively about social turmoils: ethnic frictions, religious discrimination and resource allocation. Thus, John's marginalization situation has been deepened and he still has not belongingness in Cape Town.

John's family decides to leave Worcester for Cape Town because John's father changes his job. Their house locates in a crowded place of Plumstead, in front of which is an open sandy beach and fence bushes. "The house is newly bulit, like all the houses in Evermonde Rode, with picture windows and parquet floors. The doors are warped, the locks can't be locked, there is a pile of rubbles in the back yard" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 134). We can see that the living environment in Cape Town has not much improvement comparing with Worcester. John is always with an uneasy mood and feels like he is wasting time here. He knows that there is not a proper place for him in South Africa.

South Africa is an important place for John's childhood life. It represents the colonial descendants' real life and the colonial history of South Africa. The different spaces in South Africa are given new social and cultural meanings that intensify the differences of groups in regional areas. Therefore, it will influence the identity cognition and blur the identity representation. The marginal position of John and his family at this stage lies in their unacceptable of Afrikaans culture and identity in South Africa.

4.2 Incompatibility with English Identity in England

In order to elude the bondage of realistic environment and Afrikaans cultural identity, John arrives in England to pursue his dream when he graduates from university. His life is a journey in England and the story of *Youth* is developed in changeable

accommodations. Coetzee describes John's journey process from the start of novel to last chapter. John's journey is not only physical but also individual psychological. However, in the rapid pace of commercial life, people has to toil long hours for basic necessities to meet physical needs. John is absolutely alone and roams abroad, where he is incompatible with English conditions of existence and cultural identity.

4.2.1 An immigrant in modern metropolis—London

Space provides a place for people's activities and behaviors. The boundary of space not only provides limits for themselves, but also limits the scope of their activities. On the contrary, characters give space vitality and power. The combination of space and characters provides impetus for development of the plot, and also plays a supporting role in shaping characters. Life in South Africa has never been comfortable and enjoyable for John. He regards life in South Africa as suffering of purgatory, which he has to bear because all these difficulties are the tests to reach his ideal country—England. John insists on choosing the London city as his living and working place after arriving in England, so he doesn't hesitate to give up his stable job in London suburb. Since in John's eyes, the England suburbs are culturally subordinated just like colony South Africa, and the metropolitan London is the holy land where artists gather and take root in. However, when John really settles in London, he finds that everything there is not as good as he has imagined. Instead of burning his artistic fire there, he is gradually extinguished by reality.

John's physical journey in London starts from his friend Paul's house in Belsize Park. "In a half-share bedsitter, there consists of a single room and an annex with a gas stove and cold-water sink. The bathroom and toilet upstairs serve the whole house" (Coetzee, *Youth* 41). It is obvious that living in such a crowded and comfortless room is incongruous with his ideal environment.

John's heart is full of infinite yearning for Britain from an early age, especially for

the worship of British culture. He imagines that Britain is a country full of art, where he could pursue his literary dream and European identity. London may be cold and intricate, but people are busy writing, painting and singing behind its awesome high walls. When he finds a job in England, he rents a room of a house by himself near the archway in North London. As the time went by, the glory of London city gradually disappears and the city's status as an art Utopia in John's mind gradually loses. London gradually presents its coldness and shows a huge force to alienate individuals. However, John's footsteps doesn't stop, he continues to move forward, only become more critical and dialectical when observing and thinking. The oppression of the environment is even more inclement, especially at weekend. John's uncontrollable loneliness spread all over his body, and his face is numb by prolonged silence. "In December, the weather has turned bitter. Snow falls and turns to slush freezes. On the sidewalks, persons have to pick his way from foothold like a mountaineer" (Coetzee, *Youth* 102). John's first winter in London is unusually cold due to the heavy rain and atrocious weather. During the night a pipe bursts in his room and the floor is full of water. He is surrounded by a sheet of ice when he wakes up. Now John remembers that it is summer in South Africa. He might run on the vast white sand beach under a beautiful blue sky on Strandfontein Beach if he were in South Africa. Here in London, all he knows is the crowds struggling to work, cold and rainy London with no curtains and dim lights. He changes a lot during London and he is not sure if it is getting better. Sometimes, he thinks he would die of coldness, painfulness and loneliness in winter. But he survives and when the next winter comes, he will become a real Londoner who has a hard heart as stone. London proves to be a great trainer that his ambition is much smaller than the past. At first, the Londoners' lack of ambition disappointed him, but now he will join them.

So, John's living environment and cultural identity have not changed since he went to England. He still lives in a narrow and shabby room with a hard life and a lack of security. This dilemma has confused John's mind and emotions and led to identity crisis.

4.2.2 A rover with the change of residence

John has not emancipated in the atmosphere of London and he could not bear it any more. Thus, he has to resign no matter how disgraced he feels. John's resignation represents the failure of his seeking cultural identity journey in London, so he needs to choose another destination. Facing huge identity crisis, John has an unutterable spiritual emptiness to internal self-value and external world, which makes him confused and want to flee again. However, he is merely an immigrant in London and he is lack of the courage to return to South Africa. Therefore, he is a rover with the change of residence and can't compatible with England identity.

Due to his unemployment, John must save money so he moves from the inferior streets of Archway Road to the picturesque natural scenery of Hampstead where he is engaged to look after a flat in Swiss Cottage. "The flat is large and airy, sunlight streams get through the windows; there are soft white carpets, bookcases full of promising-looking books" (Coetzee, *Youth* 119). John is obsessed with Hampstead and he is luckily to live there, which is different from what he has ever lived. Working as a housekeeper in such a pleasant space makes him full of hope to live in England again. However, the serenity is broke because John receives a warning that he must recommence his work permission within twenty-one days. After struggling between return to South Africa and continue to stay in England, he finally decides to sign a lease on a flat of a house on the fringe of Berkshire County and to work for International Computers Company. "He has his own office, a cubicle in the back garden of house. The house is a rambling old building at the end of a leafstream driveway two miles outside Bracknell" (Coetzee, *Youth* 142). In Berkshire, the estranged from family and bad weather that day after day of rain and blustery wind make him in a state of wandering. Living in such an environment, John has thought more than once about trying a job in America, but afraid of its merciless and inexorable trends.

From description of living conditions, John can be regarded as a running white man who struggles for his cultural identification. John transforms the sites constantly in

England: He firstly works as a programmer in an international computer company, living from the center of London to remote villages, which implies that it's not easy for him to integrate into London and live a rejoicing life. Then, he flits from one exotic location to another. Although he moves and grows in each journey, he doesn't realize his dream all the time.

By and large, in the alternation of physical space from South Africa to England, it is a process of identity representation to identity confusion that epitomizes the domiciled transformation of John's living environment. The primitive and backward Worcester in South Africa makes John full of grievances and resentments. However, there is a tranquil and serene farm—Voelfontein where provides a kind of idyllic lifestyle for John's heart. The advanced and open England still can't become John's destination but makes him a rover. In a word, the living surroundings and diasporic experiences make John a hybridity of multiple geographies and cultures.

Chapter Five

JOHN'S CULTURAL IDENTITY IN SOCIAL SPACE

As the core concept of spatial criticism by Henri Lefebvre, social space

> contains—and assigns (more or less) appropriate places to—(1) the social
> relations of reproduction…and (2) the relations of production… In reality,
> social space 'incorporate' social actions, the actions of subjects. (Lefebvre
> 32-33)

Social space is an important part in the novel. Different characters form a special space in social communication. Social space sometimes manifests itself in the confrontation between one thought and another, the oppression and resistance of one group to another.

The description of social space in *Boyhood* and *Youth* shows John's growing dilemma from different perspectives. It reflects his anxious and muddleheaded interpersonal confusion about his cultural identity. This chapter probes into John's suppressed social space through three sections. In family space, John's feeling towards family members and lovers is a denial of Afrikaans identity. In school space, he is often isolated because of his struggle between Afrikaans culture and English culture. In working space, he quests for his identity and literary dream in the difficult interpersonal communication.

5.1 The Identity Anxiety in Family Space

Family is a basic unit, which is made up of consanguinity, marriage or adoptive relationship. Lefebvre states that "[S]ocial space contains...social relations of

reproduction, i.e. the bio-physiological relations between the sexes and between age groups, along with the specific organization of the family" (Lefebvre 32). As an integral part of society, family is the place where we live together. The family relationship occupies an important position in growth of children. The cultivation of personality, preferences and values are closely related to family environment in which they grow up. The relationship between men and women is the central point of family relations. It is a guarantee for family members to establish harmonious relationship between husband and wife. In *Boyhood* and *Youth*, Coetzee describes his parents' marital relationships and his lovers. Through parents' conflicts and contradictions in family life, the thesis explores ethical issues and reflects value orientation of post-colonial society. This section takes family space as a breakthrough point to analyze the relationship between John and his parents in order to explore the reasons for the formation of John's unique personality and temperament so as to reveal his cultural identity anxiety.

5.1.1 Escaping from abnormal parental love

Gaston Bachelard in his *The Poetics of Space* has declared that "[O]ur house is our corner world… It is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (Bachelard 4). Parents are the most familiar people with us and they can be our emotional sustenance. However, the relationship between John and his parents is abnormal. His attitude towards his mother is loving with repellant; towards his father is antipathetic and rebellious. We can imagine John has more character flaws because he grows up in such a stifling family. This part analyzes John's escaping desire from his abnormal parental love.

First of all, the special family background has a pivotal impact on John's cultural identity. John was born in South Africa and his parents are Dutch descendants who were called Boers and speak Afrikaans. The Boer Afrikaans is the Dutch and Afrikaans

farmers, who came to denote the descendants of the Dutch-speaking settlers of the Eastern Cape frontier in Southern Africa during the 18th century. In South Africa, they had their familial farms and central power. However, the situation is rather different when it comes to the generation of John's parents. Coetzee says in his *Summertime* that "[T]hey are well-mannered Afrikaans, but not politically" (Coetzee, *Summertime* 249). Early in the latter half of the 19th century, the national movement in the antagonism to English, Afrikaans form their unique political ideal and life value. However, John's family doesn't involve in the upsurge of nationalism. They are at a discreet distance and emerge an estranged attitude. In *Boyhood*, parents' pro-British speech and behavior both show their attitudes are misfits with majority opinion.

Next, the internal structure of family and educational mode of parents effect John's growth. It brings him with the contradiction of identification. The normal family order follows the ethical norm of a stern father, a kind mother and dutiful children. However, the parental place in John's family sequence is inverted. John comes from "an unnatural and shameful family in which not only are children not beaten but older people are addressed by their first names and no one goes to church and shoes are worn every day" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 6). John's mother is the head of the family. She not only does housework but also is responsible for children' education problem. Later, when John looks back upon his childhood, he thinks his values and philosophy much influenced by his mother.

John is depressed by his family life. His mother's love for him makes him unscrupulous and self-willed. He feels that his home and school are totally different, which makes him feel ashamed at times. Besides, his mother's love suffocates him, and he realizes that he could never repay the love she had poured into him. It makes John incapable of moving when he feels like owing his mother all his life. Therefore, John's emotion to his mother is ambivalent. On the one hand, he feels guilty of her love and sacrifice and patience she has made for the family. On the other hand, he wants to run away from her guardianship regardless of everything.

Eventually, John chooses to leave home when he grows up. In *Youth*, he is

determined to leave his mother and seldom answers her letters. John admires the pattern of his friend Paul and Paul's mother, which is easy, simple and like friends. There are endless conversations between Paul and his mother. They can associate with each other like friends. Paul's mother is a photographer and has her own studio. John also wants his mother to have her own life, which is just like Paul's mother. Maybe in this way, the mother would not put all her energy into family, so he would not respond to her love with a lifetime of indifference in order to get rid of family depression.

In the novel, John never gives up pursuing identity whether in behavior or spirit. In his view, maintaining his own freedom is the most basic and important right of human beings. His mother's love to him is so smothery that he can't breathe freely. As a son, it is his duty and obligation to return his mother, but he regards this kind of reward love as a shackle imposed on him, which binds his freedom and prevents him from moving forward. In *Youth*, John makes it clear that he left home in order to get rid of family's oppression. He uses his independence as an excuse to exclude his parents from his life. John also knows that his indifference makes his mother sad, but in order to maintain his independence and freedom, he has to choose such a cruel way to treat his mother.

In family space, father plays an important role in the growth of children. The image of father affects the characters of children. However, the relationship between John and his father described in the novel is quite abnormal. In John's growth process, there is no substantive presence even though old John objectively has blood relation with him. John's disgust and rebellion feeling towards his father is always a tangle between them. The children who grow up in such a relationship show differences from their peers in personality and capacity. For example, John is not able to get along with his colleagues and lovers in adulthood. His loneliness and indifference is closely related to family background.

John's father, old John has a decent job as a rental auditor in Cape Town. Later, he loses his job, because he chooses unwisely in politics. So they move to a small town in Cape Province called Worcester, where old John works as a bookkeeper in a Jewish cannery. Little John spends his childhood in this small and closed place. Soon after,

John's father feels he could not afford his future in the cannery, so he decides to return to Cape Town as a lawyer. The whole family moves back with his father. However, life in Cape Town is not as good as they planned. It is even worse than their life in Worcester. The living environment around them is so dilapidated that John and his brother could only attend inferior school. Old John tries to open a "PROKUREUR-Z COETZEE-ATTORNEY" and the business gradually begins to prosper. However, John's father is embroiled an economic dispute because he lent money to people who couldn't repay. In order to repay his debts, he closes his lawyer company even nearly goes to prison. After this turbulence, the life of John's family is in a worse position than before. Since then, old John resigned from his company and loitered at home. All of the family burdens are placed on John's mother who does manual work for living. It can be said that old John's life is unpleasant and unaccomplished. In his company, he doesn't make any achievements. In family, he also doesn't assume the responsibility of being a husband and a father.

In ordinary family relations, children regard father as example or an object of worship, and use father's behavior as their guide of action. But John's father doesn't set an examplary role for his son in their family. In John's eyes, his father does not have anything that he is proud of, while he is always contemptuous of old John's support and love. In the last chapters of *Boyhood*, the father-son relationship gets to a tense limitation. Old John suffers a thorough pounding in work as a result of his breach of duty and makes family financial conditions more poverty-stricken. Then, old John indulges in excessive drinking and vegetating at home every day after unemployment. When old John encounters mishap, he chooses to escape and responds to failure in a way of self-indulgence rather than faces the reality actively. It's the expression of weakness, timidity and overcaution. Facing with his father, John's full of indignation and calls his father "that man" when he is talking with his mother "[W]hy do we have to have anything to do with that man? Why don't you let that man to prison?" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 156). There is barely mention of old John in *Youth*, only when John is in dire straits does he use his father as negative example to warn himself not to descend to his

father's tragic fate. When John in his tough times in London, he wonders if he will become the same as his father whose personality traits are obnoxious. John ceaselessly warns himself that he can't like his father even though he meets with refusals everywhere in his art road in London.

In fact, John's rejection to his father deeply stems from his ethical identity of Afrikaner. Afrikaners refer to the whites who speak South African Dutch and they are offspring of German, French and Netherlandish colonizers. Due to the special cultural and social background of South Africa, Afrikaners have deep contradiction with the whites of British ancestry. John is an Afrikaner in his racial identity, however, he is taught in British-style as a child and his family members all speak English. It makes him thought that he is a British, but it's a misconception to self-identity. John's impression to Afrikaners is not good because he has come into contact with those "[A]frikaners have in common too—a surliness, an intransigence, and, not far behind it, a threat of physical force…It is unthinkable that he should ever be cast among them: they would crush him, kill the spirit in him" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 124-125). Moreover, John is ridiculed and bullied by some Afrikaans boy. His father's Afrikaans friends also are vulgar and rude in manners. The ethical identity of Afrikaner makes John embarrassed even humiliated. He tries to rebel, but this kind of inherent blood lineage can't be cast off forever. Therefore, John's father represents not only the consanguinity, but also the symbol of his racial identity. The absence of paternity makes young John has not an identification model, which causes him to hover between dual identities. John's alienation and revolt to his father mixes with his rebellious and escaping attitude to South Africa.

In the apartheid era of South Africa, as a colonial white child, John experiences double troubles in the process of growing up. Firstly, it is his entanglement and confrontation with parents; secondly, it is his confusion and worries about his cultural identity. In intricate racial relationships, John is caught in cultural identity crisis. It is difficult to obtain a stable identity affirmation. John is always a silent and depressed boy and has a strong moral humiliation sense in his childhood. The suspension and

uncertainty of cultural identity also affects John's personality formation, which makes him has a strong loneliness and marginal consciousness. This kind of outsider's temperament continues to develop in his school life, in which he pursues cultural identity and explores literature and art in pain.

5.1.2 Disharmonious gender relations

There is no enjoyment in John's childhood because his deformed family damages his soul. John's mother is stubborn and emulative; John's relationship with his father is quite tense. As a child, John has a sense of loneliness, humiliation and otherness through the description of his parental role. John is desirous to be a great man in childhood and his ambition embodies in adolescent years: he wants to be an artist and a poet. Art can not only be nourished by lack, longing and loneliness, but also by love and passion. John persists that the only antidote to cure him and makes him a man is love. He needs to find a woman he is destined to be. She can jump over his monotonous appearance and directly see the fire burning inside his heart.

In *Youth*, John expresses his views on art and lover:

> Picasso is a great artist, perhaps the greatest of all. He is a living example. Picasso falls in love with women, one after another. One after another they move in with him, share his life, model for him. Out of the passion that flares up anew with each mistress, the Doras and Pilars whom chance brings to his doorstep are reborn into everlasting art. (Coetzee, *Youth* 11)

John believes that love could ignite the passion of art, so he longs to meet the destined woman. Actually, John has got in touch with many women in his life, but these are unsuccessful love experiences without exception and come to an eventual end. In the matter of gender relations, John seems to not fully understand female even not know of women at all. Concerning the relationship between art and women, John regards pain, insanity and sex as three methods to burn his inner art fire and females are only source

of inspiration. John tries to have an affair with women of different ages, classes and races, but how long can this kind of deficiency of true feeling and emotion last for. Young John's thinking pattern is too naive, he can't become a real artist before he really acquaint with the problem of what is art.

There are two reasons to explain John's doomed love experiences. On the one hand, it comes from John's indifferent personality and his misunderstanding of love. John's depression is one of the reasons why he can't live happily with others for a long time. When John begins a new relationship, he just can't devote himself wholeheartedly to his girlfriends. He is always backward-looking and leaves himself some regressive space. Actually, John isn't a pessimist. He believes in love and he acts himself as an artist. In dealing with gender issues, John regards women as catalysts to stimulate artistic inspiration. It will hinder his artistic production if he gets too closely with his girlfriends. He thinks that an artist should live in pain and experience all kinds of feelings in their life. He compares pain to his psychological school that he can't live without it. This psychological state is difficult to live with any woman for a long time. On the other hand, it comes from his parents. We often say that parents are the best textbooks and they are the earliest guidance for people to know the world. The quality of parental relationship will directly affect children's understanding to love. If children grow up in a deeply attached family environment, they believe that men and women can get along well with each other. It is also easily to build trust and maintain stable intimate relationships in future. On the contrary, they will have doubts about love and even reject and fear marriage. Through the paper's elaboration, we have known what kind of family environment John grows up in. From John began to school, he has always wanted to escape from this family, which affects his future relationship with women. He has doubts about love or marriage in his heart.

The uncertainty of identity makes John like duckweed. His identity anxiety lies in being a Dutch descendant an untraditional family, he is like an outsider who lacks cultural foundation. Besides, John cannot feel secure and belonging no matter how many lovers he has had. In the process of wandering, he is not recognized by the

mainstream society, so he can not have a high degree of recognition of his Afrikaans identity.

5.2 The Identity Dilemma in School Space

School space is an important part in social space, where a person receives maximum education in his life. Individuals systematically learn the cultural knowledge, social norms and moral codes. In a sense, school space is an important basis in a person's socialization. In *Boyhood* and *Youth*, the problems are exposed in apartheid and the trauma of oppressed people. John is survival in dual cultures in his primary school and when he comes into collage, he still struggles between ideal and reality.

5.2.1 Survival from dual cultures in primary school

> If childhood is Children's Encyclopaedia, which is a time of innocent boy, to be spent in the meadows among buttercups and bunny-rabbits or at the hearthside absorbed in a book. It's a vision of childhood utterly alien to him. Everything he experiences in Worcester, at home or at school leads him to think that childhood is a time of gritting the teeth and enduring. (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 14)

The above paragraph presents John's miserable experience in his childhood especially in his primary school life. When John just enters a new school, he needs to assume a new social role — student. It is inevitable to be influenced by past life experiences in the process of accepting new role. Born in South Africa, John grows up and never leaves here. In his mind, he is undoubtedly South Africans, but those Afrikaans teachers always bring their own political opinions into class. They can impose violence to innocent students just because their parents' political opinions are

different from theirs. The teachers' attitude to their own country subverts his cognitive system. At that time, although he may not understand teachers' actions even can not accept their values, it is clear that this experience gives a deep impression on John's psychology. He could not accept the new role attribute that teacher has passed on to him, and could not adapt to his new position.

John feels that he is not a normal boy from the early age, which is particularly evident in school life. In the Boy Scouts, he seems to be out of the place. Other boys have special yellow mattresses; only he has red rubber mattresses given by his mother. Compared with other boys, he is childish and ridiculous. In physical education class at Worcester school, other boys could easily and happily take off their shoes and barefoot for exercises while John is deeply ashamed of his bare skin. He has to rest at home after class because his feet hurt. As a social institution, school is a place for individuals to practice collectively. Boys should have good sports skills and should be adventurous and competitive. However, John is introverted, shy and gentle. He is looked down upon or even excluded in school. John is also aware of his "difference". Out of his unwillingness to be "different", he longs to be able to integrate into the collective mentality of other boys and even develop to a morbid level. For example, when he witnesses that other boys are corporally punished by teachers and are able to talk about the whips of different teachers together afterwards, he also longs to have such an experience so that he could join this so-called "boys talking". In addition, he finds that he had many secrets to hide. For example, he likes Soviet Russia and does not like the United States; he thinks England is good and Afrikaans is bad; and he never thought he is Afrikaner even if his parents are both Afrikaners. Therefore, at school, the epitome of this society, John is not recognized by the people around him nor does he want to be recognized. He has his own world and his own approved story.

Coetzee mentions his primary school life in the second chapter of *Boyhood*. There are two aspects unfold John's survival in Afrikaans and English cultures. Firstly, John rejects Afrikaans culture in language: John studies in a school where students are mainly Dutch South African that makes John lack of the recognition to African native

culture. He does not accept Afrikaans language and detests racial segregation. Therefore, John will not locate himself in South Africa no matter in geography or in culture. Language is fundamental symbol of one's cultural identity. It is not only the tool for communicating but also holds on a position of profound cultural connotation. Frantz Fanon considers that "[S]peaking, is to use some kind of syntax and master the morphology particularly undertake the culture and civilization of language" (Fanon 8). John has difficulty in appreciating Afrikaans language. "He has not the systematic training in Afrikaans language. There is a whole dense world of slang and allusion commanded by real Afrikaans boys—of which obscenity is only a part—to which he has no access" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 124). However, John knows that once he can speak Afrikaans, the problems in life can be solved easily. Afrikaans language like a ghost that accompanies him everywhere that he is natural to slip into and freely to use it. John is "at once changed like another person, simpler, lighter in his tread" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 125) when he applies the Afrikaans language. When John sat around with relatives in Voelfontein and talked about stories in former days, he "is drinking in the atmosphere greedily, intoxicating in slapdash mixture of English and Afrikaans that is their common tongue when they are together" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 81). John likes this kind of funny language that is the carrier of thinking. The description of the language severs as an implication that John's rejection to Afrikaans language. Meanwhile, he is still can not get rid of it that harasses his cultural identity.

As a child, John detests Afrikaans power, self-righteousness and brutality. In school, those Afrikaans teachers bring their political views into pure school space and impose whip to innocent students because of dissidence. John is subjected to violent insults just because he is different from them in religious choices. John lives in fear all day long since prevailing school bulling. He feels discreditable and that kind of painful sense lingers with him. Especially when he hears that they will transfer all of the Afrikaans students to Afrikaans classes, John's heart was much more terrified and he even planned to run away, drop out of school and commit suicide. Anyhow, John can not internalize Afrikaans culture and wish to disassociate the relationship with South

Africa.

Secondly, John prefers British civilization because his negative attitude to Afrikaans culture. For instance, John ardently love British sports—cricket. It represents gentle spirit and sportsmanship of Englishmen; John admires disciplined British troops, the soldiers will unflinchingly face death when they are in military confrontation. "When it comes to England and everything that England stands for, to which he believes he is loyal" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 129). But, John apparently needs to be tested before he becomes a real Englishman, and some of tests he knows that he can not pass. For one thing, John can not be a truly Englishman due to he is a person of Afrikaans ancestry. His convoluted family background and abashed economic condition give him no chance to contact with English social networks. The unadulterated Englishmen do not live in the same community with them and English children do not receive education in a school like St Joseph's, they even do not condescend to take part in the cricket competition together with Afrikaners. "English live in select areas that being far from railway line, he hears of but never sees" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 136). For another, although John looks forwards to English cultures in his childhood, he is still unapprehensive some of English arrogant manners. He is insufferable with the English's distain to Afrikaners, in especial their supercilious expressions when they hear the Afrikaans voice. There is a violent act of Englishman to Colored child overturn his English noble culture: the lodger is called Trevelyuan who is a little fat and is a ruddy of complexion man in his house. Trevelyan beats Eddie who is a seven-year-old Colored boy and comes to work for John's family. After two months of working, Eddie runs away and is discovered by Trevelyan. Trevelyan "dragges him back, crying and kicking shamelessly, and locks Eddie up in old observatory in a back garden" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 74). This incident proves that John's query to English and he can not agree with the theory of English are good.

In short, John begins to doubt his identity because of his family background and school education. Although he does not know his exact identity, it is quite certain that he is not an Afrikaner, at least not in his heart. Individuals get existent affirmation

mainly by auto-gnosis and recognition of others and society. Especially in a brand new living space, strangers around them can make people feel uneasy and confused. Therefore, people will eagerly seek the recognition of others. However, the interaction between John and his teachers and classmates not only fails to assist him gain recognition, but also widens the distance. When conflict between new environment and original life experience becomes more and more obvious, the separated condition becomes more and more prominent in interpersonal communication. It is more difficult for individuals to integrate into new environment, and their psychological state becomes more sensitive, resulting in positioning their marginalized. Therefore, in primary school, John survival in dual cultural identities and can not find his position.

5.2.2 Struggle between ideal and reality in college

In *Boyhood*, we can see a small boy who is introverted by nature casting his eyes on the world around him. Under this examination, John feels that he is incompatible with his personality everywhere. During John's college period, he is still afflicted by his intrinsic self-value and extrinsic world.

John has thought that he can get independence and break away from the restraint of his parents and South Africa when he enters into university. His "[P]lan is when he enters university to qualify as a mathematician, then go abroad and devote himself to art" (Coetzee, *Youth* 22). In The University of Cape Town, John engrosses all his attention to Pound's *Cantos* and reads it time and again. He uses the books of artists like Pound, T. S. Eliot, Pope and Shakespeare as a guide. John thinks that he is the same as those artists, if he wants to be a great person, he must endure the doleful even the disgraceful life. At the beginning of college life, he is full of expectation to his ideality and "his ambition is to read everything that worth reading before going abroad so that he will not arrive in Europe a provincial bumpkin" (Coetzee, *Youth* 25). John imagines that he is sure to get affirmation and praise because of his literary talent when he gets to

England.

At the first two years in college, John is an outstanding student in his class. But gradually, he finds himself always dizzy and sleepy, and feels more laborious in his studies. Furthermore, he encounters a problem in his learning plan: He needs to take other classes as his elective course. For John, the mathematics and other scientific subjects are becoming more modern and abstract. He has only to avoid the sciences but chooses English, philosophy and classical literature. However, to his annoyance, he is viewed as a dilettante who has artistic inclinations by mathematics students; and his English marks is not good as he has thought. John is invariably in struggle and unsure of what the study of English ought to be. In the bother with becoming a great artist and monotonous curriculum, John has more loneliness and bewilderment, sinking into the dilemma of cultural identification and experiencing the marginalization that causes the uncertainty of his identity.

In short, as a white child in colony South Africa, John undergoes double annoyance. His opposition to his parents and ignorant sentiment to gender relation are just one part; the other part is his perplexity and inquietude to his cultural identity. In anfractuous racial prejudice, John is beset with identity crisis and can not gain stable recognition. In college school life, John is always taciturn and withdrawn owing to his literary dream is shattered by reality. The non-determinacy of cultural identity makes John moody and saturnine. Therefore, in working space, John continually develops his pursuit of cultural identity.

5.3 The identity pursuit in working space

John's dream is to be a distinguished artist, however, his dream and working space are different and contradictory. John's position in working space is unstable. From part-time jobs in Cape Town to full-time jobs in London, John does not feel a little warmth and fullness in his working space. For John, it is essential to give him more freedom and individuality, rather than the narrow rural space that constrains individual

development.

5.3.1 Seeking for Freedom in Part-time Jobs

John compares himself to an island and holds that "[E]ach man is an island that you don't need parents" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 3), because he refuses the fetter in reality. He intends to keep a distance with family restraint and entanglement, seeking for freedom through different part-time jobs. Cape Town is a country full of turmoil, danger and fear. John is eager to find a stable job in this society. Whether one feels comfortable and has a stable job in the public space directly affects one's identity construction.

To prove that everyone is dependence without parents, John rents a one-bedroom apartment near Mobley Railway Station and finds a part-time job in a university library. Generally speaking, formal librarians are reluctant to work at night because the campus is on the hillside and the night is so desolate and deserted. Even John feels chill as he opens the back door and gropes for the dark corridor to turn on light.

Library work is not his only occupation. On Wednesday afternoons, he assists the math department in tutoring first-year students; on Friday, he chooses Shakespeare's comedy to give drama lessons to degree-holders; and in the evening, he is hired by an examination-oriented Review School to guide children in preparing for entrance examinations. During the holidays, he works for the Public Housing Department of the municipal government to obtain statistics from household surveys. In some degree, he has a good life when he adds up his earnings. He can pay the rent and tuition and even save a little money. He may only be nineteen years old, but he is already on his own and needn't to rely on anybody else. John wants to get rid of his family and South Africa and go to London to find his identity when he saves enough money.

In order to earn more money, John adds an afternoon tutoring in the Mathematics Department. Although he is preoccupied with his own personal worries, it is impossible to see the country in turmoil. Everything is different after the Carnage of Shapeville. There are strikes and parades even in the quiet Cape Town. One afternoon, he hears a

parade outside the Pan-Africanism Congress when he is in a tutorial class. He flees South Africa to avoid being conscripted. In various part-time jobs, John hopes to break through psychological closure and re-recognize himself as well as construct his identity. In addition, John yearns to escape from this country where he suffers from diverse hardships and exclusions in working space. The Carnage of Shapeville becomes the last straw to crush the camels. John decides to throw everything away and leave South Africa forever.

5.3.2 Quest for literary creation in full-time jobs

John's first real full-time job is to be a programmer in IBM's data-processing office in the center of West End after entering England. John seems to get into London where he has a proper job better than teaching in Cape Town and he can be paid a fine salary. In fact, the working content of a programmer does not fit his specialty and interest. There is a vast distance between his ideal and his actual job, so John entails strenuous effort in induction training. What is worse, mechanical working environment and tremendous working burden are out of his expectation. The rapid development of commercial city simplifies John's survival pattern and causes the leanness of spiritual world. Although in modern metropolis London, John's literary world does not belong to mainstream society. Therefore, IBM in London deepens his gloomy and pain, where he can not seek for his literary dream. He gets more and more miserable as time goes by. All things in IBM make him lonely and scared. Thus, he starts to go frequently into cinema and library where give him a temporary flee from loneliness and upset.

For John, it is an indispensable criterion to truly integrate into British social life and gain British identity whether British approve of himself or reject him. Shortly after arriving in Britain, John imagines that South Africans do not need identity cards because they speak English here. It can be seen that John feels that English in London is a passport. London can accommodate people of all complexions, and it also has the

social background of pursuing art. So this is the best place for him. Gradually, however, he finds it difficult to become an Englishman. There are some differences between his English in vowel pronunciation with native speakers. Therefore, John keeps trying to make himself closer to English in language and clothing. To get into the circle, John makes some efforts.

> Now here he is in the heart of London town, indistinguishable in his black uniform from any other London office-worker, exchanging opinions on everyday subjects with a full-blooded Londoner, successfully negotiating all the conversational proprieties. (Coetzee, *Youth* 51)

John feels in that way, he pays more attention to his vowel pronunciation and soon he will be recognized as a Londoner or an Englishman. But it is just his opinion. In fact, John finds himself homeless no matter in dressing or in pronouncing.

In *Youth*, Coetzee describes his embarrassing situation when he works for IBM as a young man. The office workers in IBM are undoubtedly the standard model accepted by the mainstream culture of society. They are calm, rational and efficient, but they also lack of humanity and poetry. They are almost the same as cold machines. John works in a small cubicle. When talking to colleagues, they will not discuss their wishes or aspirations. They also will not mention anything about their personal life, family and growth, politics, religion and art, so they can only express some opinions on irrelevant weather and other safe topics. The girls in the company can flirt with authentic British men, but they are indifferent to John.

The office of IBM is a unique glass-cement building, where seems to emit a kind of colorless and tasteless smell. It has been drilling into John's blood and making him numb. He swears that IBM is killing him and turning him into a zombie. John is a young man who attaches great importance to literature and art. He is tired of the impersonal working environment and the work of obliterating his personality. At last, he chose to resign.

After resigning, no colleagues express concern to John even if it is just a greeting

or a logical result. Friendship is necessary in our interpersonal relationships. But in this capitalist society, people only care about their own interests. These basic emotional appeals become luxuries and not everyone can enjoy them. The development of modern science and technology in Western society has brought convenience to people's lives, but at the same time it has also caused many adverse effects. In this mechanized era, people have been in a fast speed of life for a long time. It's making people numb and cold-eyed about everything except themselves. John believes that industrial civilization not only destroys the harmony between human and nature, but also suppresses human nature, hinders the free development of human beings and destroys the friendly relationship between human beings. In addition, when John accompanies his girlfriend as a nanny to her employer's home, the employer hardly hides his disgust to John's South African identity. Listening to the British Broadcasting and reading British newspapers is always hard for him. It is always separated by some obstacles that he can not enter. But compared with the newspapers in South Africa, the protagonist's deep understanding and worry about South Africa constantly torture him. John's identity-seeking journey is accompanied with these cultural differences and loneliness in other countries. After two years in Britain, John still fails to integrate into English social circle. He is very lonely without British friends, and spends his spare time in cinemas, bookstores and reading rooms of the British museum. The historical gap between Britain and South Africa always existed.

Space is the construction of social order and the reorganization of social relations. Space is the place of social activities, where social forces gather, which accommodates all kinds of social relations. The significance of social space lies in that it emphasizes the intrinsic relationship between society, human behavior and space. Society and human behavior influence space. Henri Lefebvre puts forward that social space is a social product, which regards the landscape in literature as a spatial metaphor and pays attention to the complex social relations between the characters reflected by the space itself and the surrounding areas. We can use Lefebvre's social space theory to explain the influence of space on human nature and the enlightenment of space on modern

society. While growing up, John is forced to toss around in different spaces and places, and has to adapt to different places so that he could accept all kinds of norms in those social spaces. In other words, John can only passively accept the identity constructed by social space for him: in the family space, he is an irritable child; in the school space, he becomes a meek and clever sheep; in the working space, he is an invisible man whom nobody pays attention to and cares about. John is doomed to be unacceptable and marginalized in the mainstream society. His heart has always been filled with loneliness, humiliation and a sense of homelessness. Like a piece of candy paper that he never told anyone about in his secret memory, he is flying alone in a vast open space. This sense of loneliness and homelessness is also a lingering shadow in John's memory, which makes him psychological alienation from his hometown, and also becomes an irreparable trauma in his spiritual home. When he grows up, John begins his wandering life with all his heart searching for a place to convert his body and soul.

In conclusion, there are two abundant semantic connotations of identity. Firstly, identification is a kind of construction and in an uninterrupted process. Secondly, identification must be built on a cognitive basis of shared characteristics, which is, one person need to have some common characteristics with another group. It is clear that identity construction is a flowing and long-term process. The abnormal family environment and humiliating school life cast a shadow on John's identity recognition. All kinds of negative emotional experiences in physical space and social space plunged him into identity crisis. The interweaving influence of physical, social and individual space makes John fall into a trap. Therefore, John's individual cognition and subjective feelings to his cultural identity is ambivalent and he ineluctably sinks into identity predicament.

Chapter Six

JOHN'S CULTURAL IDENTITY IN INDIVIDUAL SPACE

In the latter half of the 20th century, the deliberation of space is mainly divided into two dimensions: material and spiritual. Individual space is regarded as a concrete immaterial form, which can be marked, analyzed and interpreted. At the same time individual space is the construction of spirit, which is an ideological form about our meaningful life. Individual space is another significant dimension in spatial criticism. It is an internal subjective space, which is formed by the construction of human feelings and consciousness on the external world. Lefebvre believes that characters' inner world providing various new meanings and possibilities for space practical imagination. "Individual space is not a thing among others, nor a product among other products: rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationship in their coexistence and simultaneity—their order" (Lefebvre 73). Individual space is the concrete projection of physical space and social space at the bottom of characters' hearts, which has ideographic and cognitive characteristics, especially in shaping and sculpturing characters. In two novels, Coetzee pays a great attention to protagonist John's complex and misery individual world, which shows his concerns on intellectuals' spiritual world. This chapter explores John's cultural identity problems in his individual space. When John escapes from physical space and social space, individual space also changes in the process of constant resistance. The anxiety to his identity impels John begins a journey of identity-seeking. John experiences repression, alienation and disillusionment in his quest for identity, and realizes the pursuit of self-consciousness and the recognition of identity in struggling individual space.

6.1 The Depression of Afrikaans Cultural Identity

As Coetzee's latest works that focus on character's inner world, *Boyhood* and *Youth* mainly depicts hero John's rough life experience. The novels pay a close attention to his inner world all the time. In John's growth, he never stops suspecting his identity, namely, he suffers the struggle and disapproval of the Afrikaans culture, which leads to his deny of Afrikaans identity.

6.1.1 Disapproval of Afrikaans culture

Coetzee's text is not only a description and reproduction of the geographical landscape, but also a symbol and expression of the changing trajectory of the characters in the novel. In addition to accurately constructing a physical geographical landscape, he implicitly represents an individual space of characters with multiple pressures and full of metaphors. John's psychology shows such a characteristic: because of a series of objective reasons such as the marginal position of culture and race, he presents a relatively closed psychological state. Therefore, John is often placed in the situation of facing "ego" in the process of reappearance of individual psychological space, and he always tries to solve problems by avoiding reality. Hence, John suffers serious individual crisis that is mainly caused by family and social factors in his childhood.

On the one side, family background and education influences John's disapproval of Afrikaans cultures. In John's family, his mother is eight-year older than his father. On account of age and disposition, his mother becomes the one and only support especially when his father is out of work. In two novels, we can notice that John's complex feelings with both attachment and rejection. He is grateful to mother's altruistic love and protection, at the same time he struggles to free himself from family ties. Since mother's generosity, John speaks English at an early age and receives English education that result in his yearning for English culture and civilization. Compared with other Afrikaans family, John's family educatory environment is more democratic and flexible.

"[John] comes from a non-traditional and shameful family in which not only children not beaten but adults are addressed by their first names and nobody goes to churches and shoes are worn every day" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 6). In John's childhood, his mother connives his thoughts and behaviors even satisfy his wish to read books at home by falsifying medical reports. However, mother's blinding, overwhelming and self-sacrificial love disturbs John and makes him has difficulty in obtaining healthy development. John is ill-adapted to his school life and interpersonal relationship because of the English education, which gives him the false impression of he is not an Afrikaans boy. It mazes his cultural consciousness and paves the way to his futile exploration of English literature.

On the other side, John begins to examine himself to Afrikaans culture from a little child and generates inimical emotions. In *Boyhood*, the ranking-related prejudice, violent circumstance and anamorphic educational system are practical problems in daily life because of apartheid. Coetzee unfolds these incidents and his major concern is the influence to a child's individual character and emotional structure. "For what expose to him, he is too small, childish and vulnerable" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 139). The puerile and equitable nature of a child make him knows what happens around is improper and intolerable to Afrikaans culture. John lives in such a social environment that makes him fall into the mood of botheration, fright and animosity. In South Africa, John is too cowardly to abreact his approvals and dislikes. There is no doubt that he also wants to ride bicycle, read books, play cricket and wander on farm like other boys, but he just can not immerse himself in happiness of the childhood heartily on account of self-consciousness burden from Afrikaans culture. John's childhood time is always with a kind of depression and gloom. Therefore, growing up in such kind of surroundings, John is naturally difficult to integrate into Afrikaans culture. No less than he says that "[T]he Afrikaners never consider me as an Afrikaner. It's as if a conclusive test, but I can't pass it" (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 341–342). In short, there are two reasons to explain his disapproval to Afrikaans culture. First is his family background, the Afrikaans is like a stumbling block affects his cultural identification; second is social

background, John never embedded himself in White culture in South Africa and can' be shaped by it.

6.1.2 Denial of Afrikaans identity

In John's innermost, South Africa is not a real homeland because his ancestors are from Europe, but he is not a European since he was born and grew up in South Africa. In reality, Afrikaners are faced with two kinds of identification: on the one hand, they claim themselves as successors of European culture and keep in close contact with European countries; on the other hand, they can not repudiate their African identity for they have legal governing authority. The identification to European culture will definitely accept its influence and eventually threaten Afrikaners' domination in South Africa. In John's childhood, he does not have a clear understanding of social rules and unconsciously misjudges his cultural identity. The effect in childhood results in his struggling all alone in youth.

As a witness to apartheid history, John grows up in the most rampant age of apartheid in South Africa. From his childhood, John saw the suffering brought by apartheid policy. Although John's childhood is largely free of violent education for most children, he has seen violence imposed on other children and afraid of it. Discontentment and fearsome of violence were rooted in John's heart from an early age. In *Boyhood*, Coetzee clearly writes about his averseness and antipathy of South Africa. "The identity of an individual is not decided by blood lineage but a result of society and culture. Individual must constantly seek for his own position and relocate himself" (Zhang 6). Therefore, although John is born in South Africa, he is unwilling to accept it because of complex historical background in South Africa. Historically, South Africa is an immigrant country full of colonial rules and ethnic prejudice. The major aboriginals in South Africa are Blacks. The mixed-blood Boers, also known as Afrikaners who are a new race composed of the first Dutch colonists that come to South Africa and the

descendants of later German and French immigrants. They have their own language—the Dutch dialect. In the early 19th century, there are large an influx of British Whites into South Africa. British and Dutch colonists have been in incessant conflict over the rule of the land, and even break out a three-year Boer War. The British slaughters 13.6 million old people, women and children in order to get victory, in 1990, there are more than 50 refugee camps of South Africa, and prisoners are implemented coercion policy. Therefore, the British colonists and the Boers have bloody feuds.

At the same time of these two colonial forces compete for the colonial domination in South Africa, the imperial colonists has been carrying out the policy of violent suppression and apartheid against the indigenous Blacks of South Africa. Especially after the Boers of the Congress Party of South Africa took power, they carry out comprehensive apartheid, which deepen the ethnic contradiction between the Whites and the Blacks in South Africa and also aggravate the complexity of the domestic political situation. John's parents are Dutch Afrikaners, but they are Anglophile. They are totally different from the real Afrikaners in terms of language, living habits and religious beliefs. They are against apartheid, but as White people, they could not really help the indigenous Blacks. Such social background and family environment has a far-reaching impact on John's childhood life. At that time in South Africa, there is an obvious division between the Whites and the Black. The Blacks can't freely use all the resources that Whites can enjoy, and Black children can't get a higher level of education together with white children. Because the Blacks live in abominable shantytowns and the education level differs greatly from that of the White children, they can only engage in low-income manual labor. When White children can go to school, most Black children can only be enslaved to earn living expenses. Negroes suffer injustice in South Africa, even their children the same as them, which bring psychological pain to young John. There was a rumor in John's school that the government would have a new regulation that all students with Afrikaans surnames must be transferred to Afrikaans classes. As an Afrikaner, John is horrified by the rumor because the family had been ashamed of the Afrikaans identity since childhood. The traumatic history is not only in

the past, it also lingers in the mind of South Africans. Pulling out of the lengthy and drawn-out apartheid is a mental burden for Blacks and those conscientious Whites. Every time reformation takes place in South Africa is full of contradictions and disputes, turbulences and chaos. A variety of unfairness and suffering get entangled in people. Therefore, the tragic history of country and nightmarish experience of individual bring the incredible stigma to white clerisy. Coetzee says that "[O]ur generation and next generation maybe add our predecessors, we all under the pressure of a disgraceful reputation" (Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 90). Especially for John's generation, they are not beneficiaries of colonial domination, and they are abhorrent to apartheid. But at the other angle, they can not separate themselves from colonial history as descendants of European colonialism. They enjoy varieties of privileges from birth but the Blacks are degrading and servile to them, which kind of oppressive social system exist in life around and cause John's denial to Afrikaans identity.

6.2 The Disillusion of English Cultural Identity

Growing up in the rampant age of apartheid, John can not identify his Afrikaans cultural identity. He advocates European elegant art and worships European civilization from childhood, so, John is regardless desirous to rank into English society and makes his artistic dream come true. When he graduates from University of Cape Town, John begins his self-exile road overseas. In *Youth*, John has not only been languishing for identity, but also exploring his literary and artistic views. English culture is full of attractions for John who come to England with the dream of becoming a great artist. However, everything is so pale and powerless before dream turns into reality. John is disappointed to real England and can't acquire his dream life. Living in England is a "provincial life" and John pushes himself into deeper edge. From adoring British cultural identity to abandoning Eurocentrism, John gradually starts to reflect modernity, query western modern industrialization and criticize western self-centripetalism, which

reveals the dissimilation and distortion to his identity.

6.2.1 Futile exploration of English culture

John has a certain psychological presupposition on Europe long before he gets there, which mainly comes from his pursuit for art especially for literature. Early English education and works undoubtedly play a fundamental part in his individual space. Based on children's simple and perceptual understanding to literary works, it builds a psychological foundation for further study European culture and literature. The most important is John's consciously reading of European literary works in college. This kind of reading has a strong purpose from very beginning and the guiding role is greater than the role of artistic interpretation.

John insists on choosing the London city as his living and working place after arriving in England, so he does not hesitate to give up his stable job in London suburb. Since in John's eyes, the England suburbs are culturally subordinated just like colony South Africa, and the metropolitan London is the holy land where artists gather and take root in. Then, John starts exploring and reflecting on his own literary and artistic views as a young man. He is a diligent reader and follows the instructions by Ezra Pound and George Eliot out of reverence for them. We can find something in common between the two writers: their exiled experiences and outstanding artistic achievements. The pursuit of remarkable accomplishment seems to go through John's whole childhood and youth. No matter in the field of mathematics or art, he always wants to make achievements that can be crowned with eternal history. Therefore, it is natural for him to choose to worship of great men whose uprooted experience just provides a possibility for John's realistic choice that this kind of life away from home may be an important reason for the growth of artistic inspiration. It is worth noting that in *Youth*, John holds that Pound and Eliot live "lives of sorrow and sometimes of ignominy" (Coetzee, *Youth* 20). Here, John indirectly indicates the source of his cognition of "Disgrace". In the realm of art, the artistic inspiration brought by "Disgrace" may not be recognized by people in the

present age, but its value will be affirmed by history. Thus, John finds his own inspiration from the characteristics of Pound and Eliot who guide himself to start his literary exploration in this way.

John is simply delighted and thinks that London is full of artistic atmosphere when he first sets foot in Europe, but the reality is that he gradually loses creative inspiration and passion in the daily monotonous and lonely life. The uprooting experiences and the discrimination from English is nothing but the spiritual purgatory of the poet's willpower, in which he holds that the artist must try everything from the noblest to the most demeaning. But in 1960s, it's no longer the London of Hemingway, Pound and other "lost generations" and it is becoming a disturbingly mediocre city. What John feels is not strong literary atmosphere in London but pungent fog by heavy pollution. Londoners in the modern world are increasingly vulgarized, focusing more on practical material benefits such as property and stocks. Correspondingly, the mediocrity of the English literary scene is can be expected. For example, magazines are mainly discouraging words and depressing poems about trivial thoughts and experiences. The ambitions of English poets are now nowhere to be found. But John still holds on to his dream in his monotonous and lonely life. He reads Eliot, Henry James, Lawrence and so on, making painful explorations in poetry and prose. Later, in order to improve his poetic writing skills, John joins a poetry association. But the so-called poets bring him bitter disappointment and make him deeply realize that the era of the great poets is gone. London has become a great hall of novelty and entertainment. Through the false facade of high culture in London, John finally sees the true face of Britain at this moment. His disappointment in British culture makes him turn his eyes to other cultures, but neither French, German nor Dutch is within his grasp.

On the other hand, John leaves South Africa with loathing: "[H]e doesn't need to be reminded of South Africa. If a tidal wave is to sweep in from Atlantic tomorrow and wash away the southern tip of the African continent, he will not shed a tear and he will be saved" (Coetzee, *Youth* 62). However, when he tries to create English poems in London, he finds that he has not master London and the background of his creation still

can not be separated from the context of South Africa. South Africa is his trauma and the source of his literary creation. Therefore, as a disciple of Pound and Eliot, John is obsessed with the elegance of European art, but the problem is that he couldn't find the path to elegance even in Europe. He still waits for the arrival of literary Muse in the painful exploration until the end of *Youth*.

6.2.2 Loss of English identity

Andrew Gurr in *Writers in Exile* writes: "the colony is a branch of the metropolis as well as a distant tributary. Conversely, metropolis is the main source of colonial cultural and political authority" (Andrew 8). John was born in a colony who can realize the cultural subordination of South Africa and as compensation for cultural subordination, he is forced into exile in the metropolis. John aspires to find his cultural roots in metropolitan state—Britain on account of South Africa is once a colony of the British Empire together with his British education and language. In order to obtain British identity, he should firstly leave South Africa to reside in Britain, then integrate into London's social circle through working and studying. *Youth* describes the protagonist John's journey from nineteen to twenty-four years old to seek his British identity in London. This section aims to analyze John's imaginary England identity and causes of his disillusion of his England identity.

As a white descendant of South African-born and constantly migrate in Europe, John has more anxiety than other white men and can aware of more dire straits in cultural identity. In conflict of hope and reality, John is ceaselessly searching for his place and redefining himself.

The identity consciousness of South Africa and England is constantly changing. He does not want to lose both of them, but he can not obtain the stability of either one of them. Thus, identity proves to be an uncertain issue for many white South African writers. In the depth of John's heart, he is not an Afrikaner, but a white South African

on a special edge because his identity background alienates from both Afrikaner and Anglo-African groups. Accordingly, on the cultural identity, John can neither fully integrates into England nor can completely get rid of South Africa. "As an illegitimate child at the junction of European and South African cultures, Coetzee can't find his own cultural matrix. The fuzziness of his identity boundary makes him in the position of marginalization wherever he is" (Gao 48). This also causes the multiplicity of his identity and the uncertainty of cultural identity.

Readers can understand John's life journey as a process of pursuing personal identity in Europe. During the course of escaping, he meets the largest obstacle－the discrimination from others. Though he moves into London and works here, people around him almost pay no attention to him, which makes him confused and want to flee again. However, he is lack of the courage to return to South Africa. This novel tells people why the African feel disheartened. The first reason must come from the external world, the white society is full of abomination to the black who has carried out the policy of apartheid and with a feeling of sally colonies. The second reason comes out of his inner world. Though he has left his birthplace to London, the blacks force himself to deny their own ethnic culture. Thus, both the external and internal factors prevent the black to get real cultural identification. John goes to London for his dream. At first, he believes that he can thoroughly escape from South Africa as long as he works and lives in London and no longer gets in touch with relatives in South Africa. However, all experiences in London make him disappointed and fail to realize his dream.

Individual space is a representational space, which is the space that physical landscapes and social relations endowed with individual characteristics. The individual psychological space in works refers to the spatial and mental place with the typical characteristics of person in literature. Individual space bears typical characters' individual characteristics such as thoughts and emotions, and thus becomes a representational space with distinct personality. John efforts at finding a balance point when getting along with females. However, his own loneliness temperament and identity consciousness is so strong that he just can't behavior normally in gender

relations. Nevertheless, John still has his own concept of ideal relationship, he is eager for the love of soul and body in harmony between males and females. In childhood, John's individual space presents a silent and repressed boy who lived in South Africa. In his youth, John's individual space presents a self-fulfilling and mature man who lived in England.

Coetzee retrospects his life by the way of writing that hopes to break through psychological closure and re-recognize himself as well as construct self-identity in the self-psychological space. In this space, what motivates Coetzee to strive to construct his identity is not only the sense of security brought by art, but also his own ideological world.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION

John Maxwell Coetzee is one of the most eminent migrant writers in South Africa. He occupies an irreplaceable position in contemporary literature. In 2013, after Coetzee had received the Nobel Prize in Literature, Richard Poplak acclaimed him as "inarguably the most celebrated and decorated living English-language author" (Poplak, Jan 12, 2013). Although Coetzee was an Afrikaner by birth, he never accepted such an identity. He moved from South Africa to England then to America and finally relocated to Australia. Coetzee receives the impact of diversified spaces and feels the cultural disparity in repeatedly spatial transference. Therefore, Coetzee's survival and writing condition reflect palpable spatial features. *Boyhood* and *Youth,* as autobiographical novels, have drawn broad attention after Coetzee received Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003. There are ample spatial factors and specific locations and scenes in two works, such as Worcester, Cape Town and London, which represents the change of places. Besides, the subtitle of *Boyhood* and *Youth* is *Scenes from Provincial Life*, what it really refers to is the cultural estrangement and spiritual pain apart from differentiating geographical regions.

As an immigrant writer, Coetzee has experienced many physical movements and individual vagrancies. He gives a real record about his personal experiences and spiritual world in *Boyhood* and *Youth.* Moving from South Africa to England in his life, the protagonist John is in a state of marginalization and harassed by the sense of rootlessness. Coetzee's territorial writing on spaces is actually a process to endow value to works. He pays attention to the social attribute, cultural attribute and identity attribute of spaces and aims to reveal the deeper meaning of literary works behind these

spaces. Therefore, it is feasible to interpret John's cultural problems in *Boyhood* and *Youth* with spatial criticism as theoretical support. Physical space provides a basic background and living environment for the integral layout. Social space forcefully gives impetus to develop the plot of novels. Individual space relates to person's character trait and psychological thinking. Through analyzing the three kinds of spaces, the thesis portrays the diasporic and self-exiled road of a white youth, who is born in South Africa and is full of English literary dreams. Besides, the paper illustrates the effect of the collisions between South African native culture and European civilization.

Firstly, this thesis demonstrates the rejection of Afrikaans culture and the incompatibility with English identity implied in physical space by exploring the signification of landscape in South Africa and England. The shift of physical space implies the contrast of the living spaces between South Africa and England. As a marginalized person, John is extremely lack of sense of security and belongingness that causes his duality and uncertainty in cultural identity. In Worcester and Cape Town, John feels lonely and bewildered in his growing-up process and forms the peculiar temperament like an outsider in homeland. In London, John aspires to quest for his spiritual sustenance, but loses himself in modern metropolis and becomes a rover with the change of residence. From secluded countryside in South Africa to advanced city in England, John lives in narrow and confined tenements with austere furnishings and destitute conditions. The geographical change of places shows John's searching process of his cultural identity and finally John comes to the realization that he couldn't be torn apart from South Africa, where is an indispensable part of his being.

Secondly, in social space, the unfortunate experiences bring a serious challenge to John's identity cognition that gets stuck in identity crisis. In family space, John is sensitive and unconcerned about family members because of strained relations with parents. John also experiences hardships in love. His several emotional affairs end in failure, because John's natural instinct is to become an artist that make him concentrate on his inner peace and keep distance with lovers. In school space, the preconception from teachers and the bully of classmates expedite John's consciousness of identity. He

realizes that there is a significant deviation between his self-identity cognition and identity definition in school environment. During John's university time, He makes great exertions to seek for his spiritual attachment in English culture. However, he loses the creative inspiration and passion. He struggles between ideal and reality and catches identity dilemma. In working space, as a juvenile adolescent who is addicted to art and literature, John is lack of communication with colleagues. He estranges himself from adult world and grows up in an indifferent and alienated social space. As one of the main bodies in society, social life is a vital activity. To a certain degree, interpersonal communication can alleviate individual's insecurity and people can get mental power from mutual identification. The spiritual sustenance is especially significant for John who wanders abroad on his own. However, in a rapidly commercialized city, people have to work hard for their basic necessity and material basis. Besides, the complex social reality has built high rampart and barrier within people's hearts, and human's social communicative sphere and medium are greatly limited. In London, John's life is simple and monotonous. He mainly spends his free time in libraries and cinemas without new friends.

Thirdly, individual space is a self assessment that is from the negative influence of physical and social space, which forms a depressed and gloomy individual and finally sinks into the disillusionment of his cultural identity. In childhood, John develops a closed character and indulges himself into a imaginary world because of his disapproval and denial to Afrikaans cultural identity. In youth, John leaves South Africa for London, where is the core of the empire in the post-colonial period. He strives to acquire his ideal cultural identity on European continent. However, South Africa, as a deep-rooted identification tag, inextricably links with John. In addition, as a descendant of colonizers, he can not pass the test of European society. Eventually, John can only admit his futile in exploring English culture and loss of English identity. In short, John is always in a lonely and uneasy state that nobody can understand him whether in childhood or youth.

From the aforesaid elaboration, we can note that physical space, social space and

individual space are mingled together and interacted with one another. The places and locations in physical space have been branded by social activities, which are specific spaces with sociality. The family, school and working conditions as social spaces influence on John's identification through individual space. Abnormal relationship with parents, friends and colleagues affect John's individual cognition; thus, plunging him into identity predicament. Individual space manifests the deeper meaning through physical space and social space. John's passive and decadent personality reflected in the social interaction with others. In a word, John's pursuit of cultural identity has the interweaving influence of multiple spaces, which results in his serious identity confusion.

By interpreting *Boyhood* and *Youth* from spatial criticism, this paper draws a conclusion that spaces have mighty functions that act not only as an oppressor and shaper, but also as a modulator to astrict and remold people. For white intellectual who have been in exile overseas, Coetzee's thinking and pursuit of cultural identity is inevitable because of the lack of belongingness. Especially in modern society, each one experiences changes and undergoes enormous pressure. Hence, it is quite necessary for everyone to find a way to bravely face himself so as to relieve his identity problem. It should be aware that identity construction is an on-going and complex process. Therefore, in order to improve the displaced people's survival situation and help them complete their cultural identity journey, there need more attention and joint efforts of the international community.

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