

Analysis of Identity in The Childhood of Jesus

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Abstract

In the thesis, the author puts most efforts in the textual analysis and the interpretation of *The Childhood of Jesus* in the topic of migrant identity. From the perspective of Simon, the main study subject of the thesis and the protagonist of the novel, the thesis lays out the symptoms of identity crisis experienced by immigrants, including impoverishment in daily life, embarrassment in personal relations and cultural shock. The thesis also puts forward the usual measures adopted in dealing with identity crisis - integration and assimilation, specifically manifested in finding living purposes, establishing romantic relationships, and being immersed in workplace. And it points out the possible problems in the process of integration and assimilation - alienation and contradiction, exhibited thoroughly in the unconventional family formed, educational problems engendered and value contradictions uncompromised. The theories applied in the thesis are social identity and self identity. The related psychological studies, literary theories, and sociological studies on the issue of migration are also incorporated into the thesis.

Keywords

The Childhood of Jesus; Identity; Migrant; Coetzee.

1. Introduction

1.1. J. M. Coetzee and *The Childhood of Jesus*

J. M. Coetzee, a laureate of Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003, was born in Cape Town and a descendant of the Dutch immigrants in South Africa where the apartheid was prevalent. Even if he lived in Cape Town, he never identified himself as a South African. Ostracized by the British culture and marginalized by the American society, Coetzee suffers from an identity crisis which puzzles him all the way in his diaspora experience. He also constructs a compound and dynamic diaspora identity in his works.

The Childhood of Jesus narrates a transition from an unspecified past to an indeterminate future. A man and a boy arrive in Novilla after a long sea voyage. They are named as Simon and David. During the voyage the boy loses contact with her mother, and Simon assumes the responsibility for finding his mother. Afterwards, Simon arbitrarily chooses Ines, another refugee from the outside world, as David' mother with whom Simon forms a family without blood ties to raise up David. When David is at the age of six, he is forced to be admitted into a public school where a teacher disappointed by his performance diagnoses him with learning disability. A local tribunal finally delivers a verdict of sending David to a reformatory school from which David escapes. As the last resort, Simon, Ines and David decide to flee Novilla. The story centers on Simon and records his life in quest for identity.

1.2. Research Significance

Carrying two elements in its title, identity and *The Childhood of Jesus*, this thesis possesses double significance - literary significance and sociological significance.

Firstly, in terms of its literary significance, the thesis provides a new insight into the studies of Coetzee's works. The previous studies focus on the post-colonial and post-modern exhibition which is so frequently explored that its pattern is formed. As a matter of fact, Coetzee is an author with many writing styles and multiple life experiences so he should not be labeled in one way and his works created in different phases should also not be studied in one perspective. The thesis steps out of the circle and looks into the protagonists in a microscopic view of individuals. The research method employed in the thesis is textual analysis.

The novel presents a panoramic image of the life of two immigrants who are pursuing their identities in a new territory and encountering identity crises all the way along. In the process, the ups and downs in feelings and emotions reflect their psychological confrontations. From the perspective of identity, their self identity and social identity which should have reached a harmonious relationship counteract with each other. Realizing a balance between self identity and social identity is a dynamic process of compromise and confrontation. But can Simon and David finally reach an ideal balance and solve the identity crisis? The thesis will mainly discuss it in its body part.

In addition to its literary significance, the thesis also holds a sociological significance since the realistic features of the novel correspond well with the migrants' situation in reality. With an expansion of globalization, migrant groups have gradually attracted people's attention. Migrants often carry to the new territory their old connections psychologically. Past memories and identity have become a hurdle for them to adapt to the new environment so in some sense, psychological reconstruction is crucial for migrants to integrate with the new society. But in reality, most immigrants leave their homeland in order to get rid of the material penury. So the material pursuit is always their priority. Under such circumstance, they are highly likely to ignore their psychological construction and subdue their anxiety and anger when there is a conflict between their mentality and the reality. Through an in-depth analysis of the internal conflicts of the protagonists in the novel, the thesis provides an insight into the real life crisis and arouses the immigrants' awareness of identity building and their psychological construction. The social problem may not be solved by literary works but literary works can give a glimpse of the elusive crux of social problem and be expected to help people find a silver line in a depressing situation.

2. Literature Review

Since Coetzee won the Nobel Prize of Literature in 2003, he and his works have been internationally acknowledged. His representative work *Disgrace* provides much room for post-colonial studies and he is defined as a diaspora author who is inclined to expose the racial oppression, social corruption and cultural expulsion as Barnett (1999) argues. And more and more Chinese scholars have also begun to keep up with the studies. In "Coetzee and Trauma Writing", Shao (2011) claims the historical problems and systematic flaws engender the trauma writing. Jiang (2008) explores the relationship between the diaspora experience of Coetzee and the motif of his work. She explains how the author's journey of root-seeking affects the protagonist's quest for identity.

The works of Coetzee have won the reputation for many years while *The Childhood of Jesus*, published in 2013, displays a new style of Coetzee's writing. Coetzee begins to integrate more elements like religion, education, identity, and family into his writing. Since Coetzee foregrounds a religious motif in the name of *The Childhood of Jesus*, a few studies abroad lay the stress on intertextuality with the Bible. For example, Robert (2016) elaborates on the religious allusion indicated in the novel and stresses the role of intertextuality to raise the significance of literature itself and of imaginary in human life. Robert expands the migrant experience of

two protagonists to the diaspora experience of modern human living exiled from the old world, the world of long life of God. In this way, the whole novel is tinged with a religious color.

At home, Cai (2015) analyzes the novel from the perspective of philosophy, and elaborates on the construction of a utopia society in education, marriage and religion. Other scholars summarize the methods of literature criticism in identity study. For example, Li (2012) claims that the plots are arranged chronologically with the identity-seeking of the protagonist. The novel's "beginning-development-climax" corresponds with its "awakening-crisis-realization or disillusion".

Overall, studies about Coetzee and this novel are developed more from diaspora and intertextuality perspectives than from an identity perspective - a microscopic and individual perspective which has much realistic significance.

Established long time ago, identity is commonly regarded as a set of meanings that define who one is in terms of two aspects - social identity and self identity. Social identity occurs "when one is an occupant of a particular role in society or a member of a particular group", while self identity "defines who one is when one claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (Burke and Jan 2009). Broadly speaking, identity theory "seeks to explain the specific meaning of multiple identities; how these identities relate to one another; how their identities influence their behaviors, thoughts, and feelings or emotions; and how their identities tie them to society at large" (Burke and Jan 2009).

Social identity theory has been developed since the 1930s. Social identity means that social groups provide shared identity for their members and tell them what they should believe and how they should behave. Social identities also distinguish their social members from other social groups. And it "primarily focuses on the conflict and cooperation of intergroup relations" (Tajfel and Turner 1979). As a cognitive base of social identity, self-categorization theory was developed with the rise of social identity theory in 1980s - "Human groups are categories that people mentally represent as prototypes - fuzzy sets of interrelated attributes (attitudes, behaviors, customs, dress, and so forth) that capture overall similarities within groups and overall differences between groups" (Turner et al. 1987). Self-categorization theory helps one to think about which social role he plays and what properties he possesses to be included in one group and excluded by other groups. Other branches of social identity theory like self-esteem hypothesis (Abrams and Hogg 1988) and uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg 2007) also bear reference significance to the thesis. The core tenet of identity theory and social identity theory echoes itself well with the subject of *The Childhood of Jesus*.

However, studies combining both identity theories and *The Childhood of Jesus* are rare since *The Childhood of Jesus* was published in 2013. Among a few of the theses on the same subject, a dissertation of Zhang Aihong (2018) is of reference value. It probes into the identity reconstruction of the protagonists in the novel and plants the ethical theory into analysis. From the perspective of identity, Zhang (2018) also discusses Coetzee's concern for the "provincial" and his reflection on the ethics and religious beliefs. However, the thesis does not carry out an in-depth research from the perspective of identity theory.

3. Self Identity and Social Identity: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Individuals exist in the context of social structure so their social identity and self identity are like two sides of the same coin. The dynamic relationship between them is discussed as follows.

3.1. Dynamic Balance between Self Identity and Social Identity

Self is engendered in human's mind and is what characterizes an individual's consciousness of his or her being. The self is able to take itself as an object, to evaluate, manipulate, take account of and plan accordingly. "Because self emerges in social interaction within the differentiated

society, self reflects this differentiation into ‘multiple selves’. Each of these smaller ‘selves’ within the overall self is called an identity” (James 1890). From the self’s nature, although it is characterized by individual consciousness and self-evaluation, its forming is still rooted in social environment. So in some sense, self identity enjoys a common ground with social identity. In a compatible system, self identity and social identity act jointly and sometimes serve the same function. For example, in *The Childhood of Jesus*, Simon is endowed with a quality in pursuit of intelligence and self-improvement. And playing a role as David’s “godfather”, he instructs David to read and think independently, which is passed on from his self identity. And many studies have shown that the more integrated they are, the more likely they can feel satisfied and fulfilled.

The inhabitants in Novilla have a dynamic balance between social identity and self identity. Identity sources “involve social learning, direct socialization and reflected appraisal” (Burke and Jan 2009). Enjoying the above sources, local residents boast their congenital advantages. The soil their self identities grow from can also provide nutrition for the development of their social identities. Anna and Elena are typical Novilla people. Raised by the asceticism, they consider thrift and self-restraint as their own self identity and also apply them into their work and family.

3.2. Conflicts between Self Identity and Social Identity

Self identities are based on considering the person as a unique entity. In contrast, social identities are based on a person’s identification with social groups (Hogg and Abrams 1988). To embrace a particular social identity means being like others in the group and regarding things from the group’s perspective. Thus, there is uniformity in thought and action in one group.

However, the conflicts will appear when the social identity becomes too dominating or depleting. When a social identity is growing, depersonalization will take place. One has shifted attention from the self as a unique individual towards a view of the self as a group member (Hogg, Terry and White 1995). Consequently, the “me” transforms into “we” (Ashmore and Jussim 1997). If the development of social identity is contained within a reasonable range, self identity can still be preserved and developed. In contrast, if the social identity is allowed to expand infinitely, the self identity will be undermined and finally devoured by social identity. The cases can be seen in Nazi Germany, autocratic North Korea and exploitative industrial factories.

In *The Childhood of Jesus*, Simon’s stevedore workmates continue the repetitive and tough work day after day without any complaint or any idea to change. They give up all their self identities when they are in workplace. Long-term numbness and unconsciousness lead to enduring non-innovative work mode and low possibility of progress. When the social identity becomes too depleting, the necessary social roles cannot be played very well and some social responsibilities will also be compromised. David is a perfect example. Being self-willed and headstrong, he shows no respect for social rules and general disciplines. He insists on his own thinking no matter what society tells him to do. It is due to David that the family moves elsewhere since David’s self identity is so strong that his social identity is depleted almost to nothing.

4. Symptoms of Identity Crisis

In the last chapter, the identity theories applied in the thesis are informed. On the basis of it, the identity crisis suffered by the protagonists in *The Childhood of Jesus* will be unfolded in the following chapters. According to the Webster Dictionary, identity crisis refers to “the condition of being uncertain of one’s feeling about oneself, esp. with regard to character, goals, and origins”. It is usual that migrants suffer from identity crisis when they live a desolate and

helpless life without material and spiritual support. Though identity crisis is a psychological problem, its source often lies in the material inadequacy, low social status and religiously or ethnically inferior position. Symptoms of identity crisis are indicated in the way they deal with interpersonal relationships and other social interactions.

4.1. Impoverishment in Daily Life

The first challenge that immigrants face when arriving at a new territory is the material inadequacy. They need food to eat and place to live, which are the very basic human demands for living. Simon and David are quite frustrated by the living conditions provided by the refugee center. Having lived in a camp tent out in the desert for 6 weeks, they spend their first night in Novilla out in a yard with cold seeping into sheet. Simon thinks that they are treated like dirt. Even if their crisis at first mainly comes from the demand for livelihood, their struggle for construction of identity is never late. Simon is enraged by the cold night, troubled by the mislaid key to the room and mostly annoyed by the same meal - bread and water, all of which seem to be usual sufferings for immigrants in utter destitution but he does not accept them in silence. Holding some grudges, he relentlessly asks for a better living condition and a more balanced diet, which could not only lay the material foundations but also accomplish the first part of identity construction.

4.2. Embarrassment in Interpersonal Relationship

The crisis in interpersonal relation frequently occurs in immigrant groups. There are two extremes of interpersonal relations, the fear of being engaged with surrounding people and over sensitivity to others' opinions. For Simon, two extremes of interpersonal relations are intersected in his behaviors.

The fear of being integrated into the group is originated from disagreement with the surrounding people. Simon feels alienated from the environment when Ana treats him indifferently. And the views of people in Novilla are so different from his that what he thinks normal is considered as what should be suppressed, like the feeling of hunger.

The one who is over sensitive to others' opinions is vigilant to the thoughts, moods and behaviors of others and even modifies their own behaviors to live up to others' expectations and minimize the likely aversion and criticism from others. Simon is mindful of what other stevedores think about him. He struggles to finish his work in the first day to avoid contempt from others; after pronouncing his own opinions about the value of the work, he often adds some explanations to clear up misunderstanding; he keeps some distance from his coworkers by hiding his living place; even if he has many comrades around him, he doesn't have a confidant who can share his thoughts and feelings. He always holds his woes to himself.

4.3. Cultural Shock

Culture shock refers to "a feeling of impotence from the inability to deal with the environment because of unfamiliarity with cognitive aspects and role-playing skills" (Taft 1977). It occurs when one enters a new environment, removing all the familiar social connections and is exacerbated by the frustration and anxiety in the face of difficulties and challenges.

There are many symptoms of cultural shock such as experiencing bouts of anger over some minor delays, refusal to learn the new language, overreaction of minor pains and physical problems and frequent dizziness, fatigue, frustration and anxiety. On his first arrival, Simon is angry about the way he and David are treated and very concerned about the diet of the boy and his own body condition. He feels the daily heavy work is draining him so he consults with a local doctor, only to get a diagnosis of vertigo which does not explain his continuous exhaustion. Besides, language is an inevitable hurdle for them and brings a completely new social context to them. Simon and David face a great difficulty in learning Spanish. Simon is diffident about his Spanish and always gets confused in complex situations. David is even more outlandish in that

he invents his own way of speaking, on which Simon comments meaningful to nobody except himself.

5. Response to Identity Crisis: Endeavors and Problems Derived

In the face of multiple symptoms of identity crisis, migrants strive to find different ways to get through it. Assimilation and integration are usually employed. Assimilation, an inevitable procedure to be integrated into the new society, occurs when immigrants deprive themselves of their original cultures and absorb the features of the mainstream society. But sometimes it incurs migrants' diffidence in their own culture and indiscriminate absorption results in blind worship towards the mainstream culture. These negative influences are also the symptoms of alienation which make one feel separated and isolated in many situations.

5.1. Endeavors: Assimilation and Integration

Assimilation and integration are conducive to the developments in friendship, romantic relationship and comrade relationship and also to the collapse of xenophobia and prejudice. Assimilation requires a transformation of migrants including abandoning most characteristics attached to the past and embracing the mainstream culture without much suspicion and aversion. In the novel, Simon endeavors to be assimilated and integrated into the local community, though the result is not as he expects.

5.1.1. Quest for Life Purpose

Motivations and purposes orientate people's life and give them a reason to move on. The purpose of Simon in the new territory is to find David's mother. The relationship between Simon and David begins with his Utopian kindness. Since then, the tie between them has been so bound that Simon becomes a guardian and relative for David. Thus the pursuit of David's identity is Simon's life purpose.

Finding David's mother is out of Simon's kindness but has an unexpected effect. Simon also picks up the puzzle pieces of identity for himself in this process. Under such a general purpose, there are some small targets. The hope of laying solid material foundation for the life of Ines and David drives Simon to work hard; the intention of helping Ines and David get male support in a family spawns an idea of forming a family without lineage; the inspiration of fulfilling the educational wishes of Ines and David urges Simon to make an escape plan with them.

5.1.2. Intimacy with Others

Having relationship with others is a good way for one to get out of his shadow and overcome the obstacles in life. Simon meets three women after his arrival - Anna, Elena and Ines. Anna is the first women who Simon thinks is attractive and means something for him. However, the way Anna behaves and the values Anna holds are quite disappointing in Simon's view. Anna suggests children should adapt to hunger even if there is no lack of food. "Hunger is like a dog in your belly: the more you feed, the more it demands" (Coetzee 2013). The asceticism is rooted in her way of living, contrary to the inner impulse of Simon.

Fidel's mother Elena is admirable, noble and intelligent but she does not attract Simon. For Simon, the first impression of her is not very pleasant - an angular and gaunt woman with prominent teeth. And she only shows a sign of goodwill to Simon instead of heterosexual attraction. Nevertheless, acting as an advisor, confidante and occasional partner for Simon, Elena is still his best female friend giving advisable suggestions when Simon is troubled.

Quite different from Elena, Ines is elegant in appearance, "the lady who arrives at the door wearing a rather formal dark blue dress, a curious little hat with a gaudy gold hatpin" (Coetzee 2013). But she seems to be spoiled, self-indulgent, rather whimsical and whiny. Her attitude to Simon is always hostile and she never shows any attractiveness to Simon.

In the new territory, Simon endeavors to establish intimate relationships with women but all end up in failure.

5.1.3. Adaptation in Workplace

For an immigrant, job provides the basic necessities to live on and the sense of belonging in a new society. With the time passing, the meaning, compatibility and worthiness of job itself are taken into consideration. Job turns from a means of living to realization of individual value, which is both a blessing and a curse. For blessing, it is glad that one climbs up in the Maslow's hierarchy of needs from physiological needs and safety needs to self-actualization and self-transcendence. For curse, the constant doubts about current job make one feel discontent and be trapped in the self-pity and regret.

In the beginning, Simon demands a job to meet his basic needs for food and shelter. He must adapt to the work at quayside despite all the physical indisposition and psychological reluctance. As for a stevedore worker, strength is the most important. Simon is a strong middle-aged man but he still feels fatigue after the heavy work which gradually wears him down. Nevertheless, he could not give it up because work provides the material foundation he needs to achieve his purpose. At the second phase, he begins to think about the significance of his work, which is demonstrated in his philosophical argument with his comrades at break. He cannot figure out what the point is to carry grain from point A to point B when the cranes are available and to store large amount of food when it is consumed by rats. For him, his work could not give him a sense of achievement and spiritual satisfaction. Besides, "the pursuit of positive social identity may reflect one of the most basic of human motives for self-enhancement and self-esteem" (Sedikides & Struve 1997). The stevedore work is a repetitive work which can bring nothing but a deteriorating body. It will neither provide self-esteem nor self-enhancement until a new significance is added.

Despite this, to adapt to the new work, he tries to compromise his doubts and scruples by mingling with his co-workers and convincing himself to cherish the valuable job opportunity. "How could he have belittled the work of which his friends are so proud, work in which he is grateful to be allowed to join" (Coetzee 2013). In the process of adapting to his new work, Simon has undergone the experience of self-deception and inner conflicts.

5.2. Problems Derived: Alienation and Contradiction

The problems derived from assimilation and integration are presented as alienation and contradiction. Alienation can cause the feeling of meaninglessness, estrangement, powerlessness and having no significance and purpose. And contradiction between one's inner world and outer environment will trigger negative feelings and antisocial sentiments. The awareness of alienation and contradiction would drive people to make some changes in family, education and value formation.

5.2.1. Family Without Lineage

The literary family in *The Childhood of Jesus* is the one without lineage as the traditional family is very hard to form for a migrant like Simon. There are some reasons behind.

First, the identity crisis Simon suffers from after finding David's mother drives him to establish new relationships with David and Ines. Making Ines David's mother makes Simon think his mission has been accomplished and he decides to leave. In the absence of David, Simon's life is more insipid than ever before and the living standard is inevitably lowered. The sudden separations from his intimate person as well as his long time mission cause a big earthquake on his shattered plates of heart. Thus to overcome the identity crisis, he must make some changes.

In addition to Simon's desire, the needs of David and Ines also drive a new family to be formed. David's educational needs are obvious in that Ines's way of education is flawed and problematic.

Under Ines's guardianship, David at the age of five is wheeled in a stroller with his thumb in his mouth and is dressed in blouse with the frilly front. David's personal relationships have also been negatively affected. Fidel used to be David's friend, but Ines disrupts their friendship by keeping David in her company. Being overprotective of David, she even does not let air into the house in case David gets cold. Ines is described metaphorically by Elena as "a little girl with a doll - an unusually jealous and selfish little girl who won't let anyone else to touch her toy" (Coetzee 2013). Besides, Ines is unable to deal with the usual problem in the house so she has to ask someone to help her. The incapability of Ines and the need of a helper in the family remind Simon that he is needed in this family.

Simon, David and Ines thus form a new type of family, a family to protect and take care of David. It is an innovative one without assuming the extra responsibilities and obligations except raising child. The family without lineage or the quasi-family only serves the half function of a normal one.

Family without lineage has its own advantage since it is formed for family member's benefit. In this family, member can develop their interests and careers independently and pursue their own path without intervention. However, the demerits of this kind of family are also very obvious. Traditional family formed with children is bound by blood and thus more solid and reinforced because blood relationship is an inborn relationship. But Simon, David and Ines are not bound by blood so they do not have that innate connection. Besides, Simon and Ines do not have affection, which adds another unstable factor into this makeshift family. The family without lineage will be highly likely to collapse if there are conflicts or lack of trust between family members. Though the new family is relatively harmonious in *The Childhood of Jesus*, Coetzee unfolds a little crisis in *The Schooldays of Jesus* when David asks to leave the family to live in the boarding academy. David is the only reason for the family to exist and also the biggest latent risk for its collapse.

5.2.2. Educational Problems for a Special Child

It is demonstrated in many facets that David is special. First, David is a very intelligent child. Only after two weeks of studying chess, David could even beat Eugenia, the most bookish of the stevedores; he learns reading almost by himself and he is also very good at tennis. Nevertheless, his uniqueness is mainly demonstrated in his idiosyncrasies and uncanny thinking. He is not willing to learn Spanish, and he invents his own language; he claims he knows numbers very well but he refuses to learn the arithmetic rules; He refuses to accept universal rules and physical laws in our world as he refuses to understand the conventional numeracy. "It is as if the numbers were islands floating in a great black sea of nothingness, and he was each time being asked to close his eyes and launch himself across the void" (Coetzee, 2013).

For a special kid, usual educational methods don't work. At first, Simon tries to teach David at home, which goes not well. Then, David is forced to go to school but he could not adapt to school life. He ignores all the rules schools set up to maintain the classroom orders and never surrenders to any universal rule he has been taught. "He is restless and he makes the other children restless too" (Coetzee, 2013). Being disobedient and rebellious, he runs out of the reformatory institute set up for special kids.

The fact that David is always exasperating and disobedient indicates he suffers from severe identity crisis and he always sacrifices his social identity to realize his self identity.

5.2.3. Value Contradiction

People in Novilla seem to live like ascetic monks. They don't drink tea and only get the necessity (bread and water) to sustain life. Anna, a typical Novilla inhabitant, believes human should inhibit the swelling appetite and subdue their desire from growing. However, Simon thinks appetites and desires are the reasons people live and "beefsteak with mashed potatoes and gravy" is what makes people refreshed and the hunger and sexual desire are not sins but the

original motive for social transformations and progress. He can't bear this bloodless and tedious society with decent and kindly people.

Simon also takes courses in the educational institute for adults. The philosophical class is concerned with the philosophical diversity and unity of desks and chairs, but all of those especially chairness of chair irritate Simon for its tediousness. Life drawing class should have triggered some sexual desire for men but everyone here is very serious about it. The city is like a morgue after dark because everyone studies to improve himself except Simon who could not fit in the humble, gentle and civilized society in any way.

In addition, Simon has value conflicts with his comrades. He thinks the amount of grain carried by one go of the crane equals to his work of a whole day so he proposes the use of crane. However the foremen shrugs off his question, thinking unloading grain is the necessity of life and is very lofty and meaningful. So they are contented with the status quo and have no wish to change. Therefore, Simon's complaint and proposal are undermined by his comrades' indifference to change and progress.

6. Outcome of Identity Crisis: Balance Unachieved

In the process of adaptation to the new environment, Simon is endlessly beset by doubts. His idealistic pursuit of new identity is tested against the real problems he faces and an investigative mind he is endowed with. The contradiction between self identity and social identity is entrenched in his long-term psychological tug-of-war.

For an immigrant, establishing social identity is his priority because social identity determines his psychological states in family, workplace and social organizations and provides him with physical life frames in which he can consider his spiritual demands and construct his identity with material guarantees. Social identity in most cases exerts an overwhelming impact since society is apparently more powerful than individuals and the role in a particular social group is more easily recognized. As a result, the imposing effect of social identity endangers the development of self identity, which causes one of the extremes of imbalance between self identity and social identity.

However, in *The childhood of Jesus*, Simon and David encounter another extreme - failure in realization of social identity due to overprotection of self identity. Simon, a sensible adult having the ability to weigh and balance, still cannot adjust himself to the new environment and are eventually forced to leave. It can be explained by his migrant characteristics and diaspora experience. Immigrants always carry old attachments with them. Despite the fact that Simon has been washed clean of his past memories, the past experience and remaining feelings still serve as a tenuous link connecting the present and past, which can be proven when he finds Ines's mother on the strength of hunch. His endeavors made in the pursuit of social identity only multiply his doubts and make him believe his social identity cannot have a harmonious relationship with his self identity. For David, being locked in his own world, he never pushes himself to surrender to the regulations and requirements of society. He only constructs his self identity in disregard of any obligation in his social identity. As Socrates once put, when one feels discontent with one system, he either changes it or eschews it. There is nothing they can do to change their status quo, so they have to leave, thus abandoning their social identities in Novilla. Indeterminate future means both infinite possibilities and unknown risks and challenges. Driven by all their expectations and desires, Simon, David and Ines set foot on a new travel. In the lately published *The Schooldays of Jesus*, readers are shown a sketch of life of Ines, David and Simon in Estrella where they are pursuing a new balance between self identity and social identity.

7. Conclusion

The childhood of Jesus written by Nobel Prize winner J. M. Coetzee is a masterpiece worth exploring and studying. The theories applied in this thesis are self identity and social identity and their relationships in psychological terms. Through an in-depth textual analysis of *The Childhood of Jesus*, the thesis explores the causes, process, and problems of identity crisis and the endeavors migrants make. The psychological conditions of Simon are analyzed objectively and illustrated thoroughly based on the existing studies on identity, assimilation, isolation, alienation and cultural shock. Although Simon and David cannot realize a balance between self identity and social identity in *The Childhood of Jesus*, they are still in pursuit of such a balance. In *The Schooldays of Jesus*, the sequel of *The Childhood of Jesus*, they will face a different social environment and try to adjust themselves to their new social identities.

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