

# Lu Ji's Inheritance and Change of Confucian Ideas in *Wen Fu*

Baohua He

Southwest Jiaotong University Press  
Chengdu, China

**Abstract**—*Wen Fu* is one of Lu Ji's representative works and embodies Lu Ji's views on literature. *Wen Fu*, which inherits the theory of *A Discourse on Literature* and opens *Wen Xin Diao Long*, shows that in the transitional period between the Jin Dynasty and the Southern and Northern Dynasties, literary theory changed with social thought. With the prosperity of metaphysics in the Jin Dynasty and the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the monopoly position of Confucianism in literature was broken. At the same time, other aspects of social life, as well as Lu Ji's own character, all had an impact on his literary thought in all directions. In *Wen Fu*, it was the inheritance and change of Confucianism.

**Keywords**—Lu Ji; *Wen Fu*; Confucianism; variation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Lu Ji, Western Jin Dynasty writer. *Wen Fu* is a literary criticism written by Lu Ji with the "Fu" style, and we can see from the discussion of the literature on the literary issues that this article is not a certain social thought in literature. The reaction was to show the efforts of Lu Ji himself to reconcile different ideas and draw his own views. On the one hand, the impact of Lu Ji is derived from the traditional Confucianism that constitutes the background of the Lu Ji thought. Different from the decline of Confucianism in the Central Plains, the scholarly style of Soochow still follows the Confucian tradition of the Eastern Han Dynasty, while Lu Ji's family is a large group of Soochow and also have large Confucians. The personal thoughts and literary views of Lu Ji cannot be deeply influenced by Confucianism.

On the other hand, the other side of his thought comes from Lu Ji's correction and change of Confucianism. The prevalence of metaphysics in the Central Plains is impossible not to have an impact on Soochow. At the same time, the strong personality of Lu Ji personally makes him show a different personal view from the traditional, and can be said to be the "self" awakening of Lu Ji. The "self" in the so-called "self-awakening" is not the self-consciousness in the modern sense, but the author's own influence on the article and the meaning of the text itself to literature in the process of writing.

In *Wen Fu*, the author's position in literature has received more attention. This is reflected in its text detailing the author's state of writing and the specific process of text formation. At the same time, the author's own color is also found in the general evaluation criteria of literature. The

significance of the text itself is reflected in the balanced efforts of Lu Ji in the relationship between the quality and the style of the article. These together have caused the contradictions and reconciliation ideas that Lu Ji showed in *Wen Fu*.

## II. QUIET CHANGE IN JUDGING CRITERIA

The change in the attitude of Lu Ji was first reflected in his changes in the overall evaluation criteria of the article. In the preface, Lu Ji explained his motivation for making this article: I constantly fear failure in my conceptions' not being equal to the things of the world, and in my writing's not being equal to my conceptions. Sun Yuefeng say "that is changed from 'What is written does not give the fullness of what is/was said; what is/was said does not give the fullness of the concept in the mind.'" This sentence comes from *Zhou Yi*, *Xi Ci*, and puts forward the relationship between the earliest "word", "language" and "meaning". This sentence actually thinks that the relationship between the three is gradually reduced. The written words cannot fully express the language, and the language cannot fully express the inner meaning. But this is not absolutely true here at Confucius. After the "What is written does not give the fullness of what is/was said ;what is/was said does not give the fullness of the concept in the mind", there is "If this is so, then does it mean that the concepts in the minds of the Sages cannot be perceived?" He said, "The Sages established the Images to give the fullness of the concepts in their minds, and they set up the hexagrams to give the fullness of what is true and false in a situation; to these they appended statements to give the fullness of what was said."<sup>1</sup>

Confucius thought that sage's "meaning" is knowable, which is conveyed by "image" and implicitly expressed by "Xi Ci". Stephen Owen thought that "The central assumption in Confucian language theory (excluding those early, failed attempts to develop a theory of signs) is that language is essentially synecdochal: an inner whole manifest a necessarily diminished surface, and through that peculiar "part" the whole may be known." Therefore, Confucius taught his disciples in the *Analects of Confucius*. In narration and literary creation, as long as the words are expressed in place, there is no need for more literary texts. This sentence also shows that Confucius believes that "resignation" can be

<sup>1</sup> Wang Bi, Kong yingda. *Zhou Yi Zhengyi*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999:291.

"achieved". Compared with the story of "Wheelwright Pian, who was cutting a wheel" in *Zhuangzi*, we can see the difference between Confucianism and Taoism in their understanding of the sentence "What is written does not give the fullness of what is/was said".

Here, in Lu Ji, what he is worried about is "failure in my conceptions' not being equal to the things of the world, and in my writing's not being equal to my conceptions". His basic criterion for the article is "conception can be equal to the things of the world, and the writing can be equal to my conceptions", which means that the three can be accurately conveyed according to the level. From this point of view, it is no doubt that he was influenced by the Confucian tradition.

However, from the words used by Lu Ji, we can see some quietly changing places. Scholars have always explained "meaning", "object" and "text", and "meaning" in them is a place that seems clear, but the reference is unclear when it is studied carefully. Fang tingui thought that "conception is the meaning of the article, equal means similar. The thing is what is written in the article, and the writing is the words." Tang Dayuan thought that "The inner thought can't match with the outer things, or although the inner thought matches with the outer things, it lacks the words to express it." Guo Shaoyu refines the reference of "conception" into three kinds, and pointed out that what Lu Ji emphasized was "conception" formed through thought", and the "conception" here was painted with distinct personal color of the author

It is also the structure of "the feeling of external things arouses people's emotion, and the emotion is expressed through language and words". The Confucian tradition like "All tones that arise are generated from the human mind. When the human mind is moved, some external thing has caused it"<sup>2</sup> or the "in the mind it is 'being intent'; coming out in language, it is a poem"<sup>3</sup> in *The "Great Preface"*. In this theoretical understanding, the author's mind is not an active creator, but a passive communicator. The mind waits for the plucking of objects and then transforms them into words and words. But here in Lu Ji, he chose "conception" to highlight the important role of the author's own mind in the formation of the article. The author does not passively wait, but actively seeks, conceives, and approaches. "Creation becomes an activity of will, something that is stored in the mind before being activated and thus waiting to be reflected."<sup>4</sup>

Lu Ji's "failure in my conceptions' not being equal to the things of the world, and in my writing's not being equal to my conceptions" seems to be in strict accordance with the Confucian standard. In fact, through the change of words, Lu Ji shows his self-consciousness as an author. It is no longer a natural formation that "conception can be equal to the things of the world, and the writing can be equal to my conceptions". Instead, it is branded with the author's efforts

in personal conception. This standard is not only the evaluation standard of the article, but also the measurement index of the author.

### III. EFFORTS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTENT AND FORM

The relationship between pattern (wen) and substance (zhi) has always been a focus of Confucian literary theory. At the beginning, these two concepts do not refer to the content and form of literary works, but have a broader concept, generally referring to the relationship between all forms and content. Later, the relations between these two concepts expressed two opposite relations: simple expression and gorgeous decoration. In the context of Confucianism, for individuals, it refers to their inner self-cultivation and appearance, for countries, it refers to their cultural connotation and ritual system.

The Confucian classic "Book of Rites" once said when commenting on the past era: "The zhi of Yushun period and Xia Dynasty, the wen of Shang Dynasty and Zhou Dynasty, are the best, but the wen of Yushun period and Xia Dynasty can't match their zhi, the zhi of Shang Dynasty and Zhou Dynasty can't match their wen." Although it cannot be concluded that this is Confucius' words, the spirit it contains is undoubtedly the same as Confucius. While saying "How complete and elegant its rituals are! I follow up Zhou", Confucius also realized that the rites and rituals of the Zhou Dynasty were cumbersome at the end, so that they neglected their core content and admired the form. The gorgeous complexity of appearance far exceeded the extent to which its connotation could withstand.

Therefore, he would say that "Those who learned rituals and music first and then took office were the common people; those who took office first and the learned rituals and music were the sons of officials. If I were to appoint someone, I favor the one who learned rituals and music first." "Ritual, ritual! Are jade and silk all that is meant by ritual? Music, music! Are bells and drums all that is meant by music?" All these reflect Confucius' dissatisfaction with abandoning content and pursuing form only. On the other hand, Confucius did not despise the form. Ji Zicheng said, "Only the substantial qualities are wanted in a superior man. What can ornamental accomplishments do for him? The Master said, "I'm sorry, sir. that you spoke of al superior man in such a way. Even a team of four horses cannot overtake and recover what is already said. Ornament (wen) is as substance (zhi); substance is as ornament. Without the fur, a tiger or a leopard's hide is like the hide of a dog, or goat."

Without the difference of ornament (wen), there is no difference between the tiger and the dog, without the distinction of dress system and manners, it's hard to distinguish between Chinese and barbarians, gentlemen and villains. Therefore, in the end of the discussion, the relationship between wen and zhi has been expressed as an indispensable and equal relationship: Natural substance prevailing over ornamentation begets roughness; ornamentation prevailing over natural substance begets pedantry; natural substance and ornamentation duly blended

<sup>2</sup> Zheng Xuan, Kong yingda. *Li Ji Zhengyi*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999:1074.

<sup>3</sup> Guo Shaoyu. *Chinese literary criticism*. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2001:63.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Owen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2003:86.

make superior man. From here, we can see Confucius' efforts in reconciling the relationship between wen and zhi.

In later generations, the relationship between wen and zhi was embodied in the literature as the relationship between the content of the article and the rhetoric, and it has become a frequently discussed topic in Confucian literary views. Scholars of all ages will put forward this idea and put their own brand in it. Although all the arguments are attributed to Confucius's "natural substance and ornamentation duly blended make superior man." at the end, everyone still enjoys it.

Here in Lu Ji, the relationship between wen and zhi has been given a most accurate description: Natural principle (li) supports the substance (zhi), a tree's trunk; Pattern (wen) hangs down in the branches, a net of lushness. The "Five Offices" thought that, "zhi like the root, is the foundation. The reason for writing an article is that we must first support the fundamental things before we can set up the main body of the article. That is to clarify the truth first, and then choose the vocabulary, so that the article can be as deep rooted as a tree." Luo Hongkai quoted the view of Fan Ye and said, "It is often said that emotions are expressed, so we should give priority to meaning and use words to express meaning. If we only want to express the meaning through words, the words will not be circulated for a long time." The view of the "Five Offices" and Luo Hongkai did not exceed the conventional criteria, and they revealed the most obvious meaning of Lu Ji: Content is the core, the form is decoration. Xu Fuguan thought that "by using the skills of the words (wen), the zhi can be exerted in many aspects (a net of lushness)". But it's too rigidly to think that "a net of lushness" is a metaphor for many aspects of an article rather than a metaphor for the luxuriance of words.

On the one hand, Lu Ji inherited the Confucian tradition of the relationship between wen and zhi. On the other hand, he believed that wen was not only a subordinate of zhi, but also had an inherent homology with the zhi.

He compares Wen and zhi to different parts of the same tree, and reveals the fact that the form is not random, but has a deep homology with the content. Content and form are not only the simple relationship such as who decides who or one is the surface, and the other is the core, but also the inseparable relationship from the birth. Certain content can only be expressed in a certain form.

Next sentence of "Natural principle (li) supports the substance (zhi), a tree's trunk; Pattern (wen) hangs down in the branches, a net of lushness" is "Truly mood and manner are never uncoordinated, Each mutation is right there on the face", Some people interpret it as the relationship between the author's own emotion and the emotion reflected in the article. In fact, the "truly mood and manner" here is still the relationship between the content and form of the article. According to Xu Fuguan, "these two sentences mean that successful works, content and form, must be unified without gap." Zhang Shaokang also holds this view.

#### IV. NEUTRAL VIEW ON ARTICLE STYLE

When discussing the ills of the article, Lu Ji used music as a metaphor to tell the five points that the article needs to do, that is "response" (yin) "harmony" (he) "strong emotion" (bei) "dignity" (ya) "allure" (yan). The two points "though strong emotion is present, it may lack dignity" and "Dignity you may have, but no allure" can best reflect that the land machine inherited the Confucian criticism tradition while injecting its own ideas.

"But suppose you let yourself go rushing into choral unisons, devote yourself to the bewitching beauty of an orgy of sound: Pointlessly you please the eye, match the common taste, the sound may be loud indeed, but the tune inferior. Be aware of Fang-lu and sang-jian — though strong emotion is present; it may lack dignity." Many readers have made different interpretations of "fang-lu" in the sentence. Li Shan, He chao and Cheng Changhui think that represents elegant music, but Yang Shen and Chen Yujiao think it and "Sang-jian" are both the songs of enchantment. But no matter what kind of explanation, the main idea of this passage in those people opinion is to praise the "elegant and upright" style of Confucianism. The original meaning of "bei" is sadness, but here "bei" means strong emotion. "ya" means "dignity and elegant". This concept is obviously derived from the criticism of the Confucian tradition, but it is not limited to this. In "The Great Preface", "Ya" means "proper" (zheng). These show the source of either flourishing or ruin in the royal government." The "Ya Zheng" here in Lu Ji has faded away from the meaning of political prosperity and abolishment. This passage criticizes "the article is frivolous and vulgar, which is not in line with the way of elegance"<sup>5</sup>.

"Suppose you have a chaste indifference and graceful restraint, always cutting away complexity, getting rid of excess. It will lack that "flavor omitted" of the ceremonial broth. It will be the same as the chaste reverberations of a temple zither. Even though "one sings and three join in harmony", dignity you may have but no allure." Li Shan cited the interpretation of Lu Ji annotated by Zheng Xuan to explain this sentence: "ceremonial broth: gravy without salt", "the sound of temple zither is simple and unadorned". The ceremonial broth and temple zither are all supplies of ceremonial occasions and represent the most elegant aspects of the Confucian tradition. After advocating elegance in the last sentence, Lu Ji immediately corrected the Confucian tradition of elegance through this sentence. He opposed blindly advocating elegance and simplicity, but insisted that the gorgeousness of words should be guaranteed at the same time.

In the era of Lu Ji, "Yan" has become a common pursuit. The fascination of words and the prosperous literary style became the literary trend of this period. Lu Ji's own poetry style is a typical masterpiece. Lu Ji is brilliant, well read and has a clear personality. At the same time, he has the ambition to make a difference in the world and to build a career. This pursuit of gorgeousness is more like a way to prove one's

<sup>5</sup> Lu Ji, Zhang Shaokang. *Wen Fu Jishi*, Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House. 2002: 204.

own existence and ability than just the trend of the times. Soochow's great emphasis on Confucianism, the family style of Lu Ji and Lu Ji's preference for flowery words, all of these contribute to Lu Ji's neutral view on article style.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Lu Ji reflected the influence of Confucianism and his own breakthrough in the process of writing *Wen Fu*. While breaking through Confucianism, the contradiction of Lu Ji is still worth thinking. His implicit pursuit of the importance of the author and the subjectivity of the text, is it the idea of compromise under the guidance of the doctrine of the mean, or is it influenced by other thoughts such as metaphysics? Or is it really a breakthrough in the self-consciousness of Lu Ji? The author thinks that there are both, but the breakthrough of individual self-consciousness should account for a larger proportion. Lu Ji is a man with strong character, which can be seen from his life and words and deeds. As a southerner scholar, he took a strong counterattack to sarcasm after entering Luoyang. He knew that the central plains were upset but he still relied on his talent to help the world. All kinds of deeds show the strength of his personality. The strong background of family and the strong personality of individuals in literary criticism are his inheritance and profit and change of Confucian ideas in *Wen Fu*.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Lu Ji, Zhang Shaokang. *Wen Fu Jishi*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House. 2002.
- [2] Stephen Owen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2003
- [3] He Yan, Xing Bing. *Lun Yu Zhushu*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999.
- [4] Wang Bi, Kong Yingda. *Zhou Yi Zhengyi*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999.
- [5] Zheng Xuan, Kong Yingda. *Li Ji Zhengyi*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999.
- [6] Guo Shaoyu. *Chinese literary criticism*. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2001.