

Analysis of the Human Nature in Modern China Based on Lu Xun's Works

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ABSTRACT

Modern China is a critical period of China because during this period, plentiful literature and artistic works were produced by various writers and artists. Along with the political movements, people's minds and thoughts had changed dramatically with the influence of these works. The purpose of this article is trying to analyze the state of the human mind in this particular period under multiple factors through one of the most influential writers' works—Lu Xun's works. *A MADMAN'S DIARY* and *KONG YIJI* were the two selected works for this research, due to its great significance in the modern Chinese history. The conclusion of this study would contribute to psychological and literary research in that human nature is affected by the culture, despite the fact that culture is constructed based on people's life.

Keywords: *Lu Xun, literature, humanity, A MADMAN'S DIARY, KONG YIJI*

1. INTRODUCTION

Human nature is colorful and complicated. How to understand human nature, and what are the ways to understand it become very important [5]. The attempt of this paper is to sort out the entry from the literary path, and finally attain the basic characteristics of human nature in culture. The way to solve the cognition of human nature is the possibility of starting from literature. Existences of human being are unique, which is different from other creatures that we named it humanity. Although it is invisible, people still believe in its presence, as every moment and event in our lives can all be its externalized performance. All the phenomena and states of human life can be called the state of humanity [4]. Therefore, some questions arise, such as where humanity comes from, how it was formed, and how the difference between people was formed. Obviously, some patterns exist, which need to be found out and concluded. To answer those questions, a crucial factor must be included—culture. Throughout various opinions, a conclusion can be made that humanity is not only formed within the culture but also shaped in the culture. Human behavior and thinking are determined by self-consciousness, which is also shaped by the culture. Depending on it, people's recognition of human nature is to see how self-consciousness reacts to the culture. Culture is another concept that would be discussed in this article. Culture is based on a human's response to survival consciousness. It is displayed in our life and it forms various rules and patterns. As a result, it becomes much more challenging than people's expectations to understand human nature. Despite that there is a batch of obstacles, people progressed with many works to reveal the authentic look of human nature in the history of human. Among all the materials, the literature seems a better approach for

studying human nature as it reveals states of human nature by describing scenes, relationships, and languages. This article focuses on human nature by analyzing self-consciousness literature to understand human nature. This approach could also be applied in the study of Chinese ethnicity or states of men and women's human nature [3]. Therefore, Lu Xun's works were chosen to be the references in this article because most of his works reflect the weaknesses and states of human nature, which contribute to the elaboration of the topic of this study.

2. ANALYSIS OF LU XUN'S WORKS

There are four ways to learn from Lu Xun's literary works, which are changes in languages, relationships of character, scenes, and language environment.

2.1 Change of Languages

Languages of Characters reveal people's inner thoughts and logic. There is a sample in Lu Xun's *KONG YIJI*.

They circled Kong Yiji. Kong would give out anise beans to them, one for each. The kids ate the beans, but stayed there, staring at the dish. Kong Yiji felt flustered. He covered the dish with his palm, bending down: "Not many left, I don't have many for myself". He straightened up, took a look at the beans, shaking his head saying pedantically in his old fashion way, "Not many left, are there? There are not" [1].

In the story, Kong is an intellectual who failed the exam. From this quote, it can be seen that he pursues respect among those children. He regards the identity—intellectual—as the honor that he needs others' appreciation to maintain his vanity. In other words, he wants to prove that he is special. However, there is a

massive gap between what he tries to pursue and identification in reality. The split state of the personality structure is revealed in the characters' language. This reflection of could be found historically that during Qing Dynasty, people still think they were able to defend western countries who possessed advanced weapons. However, the reality broke their perfect imagination. Qing was soon conquered by those states. Under this big background, Lu Xun's languages reveal people' mental state under the influence of examination and autocratic system.

There is another example in *A MADMAN'S DIARY*.

"...he was no older than around twenty, but I could not see his features clearly...' I then asked him 'Eating people, is it right?'...he said, 'If it's not a famine year, how can one eat people?' I...persisted in questioning him. 'Is it right?'"...But I'm asking you—is it right?... His face then changed, hardening and becoming white all over. He...said, 'Maybe it's true, and it's always been like this...' 'It's always been like this, so it's right?' 'I don't agree with this reasoning of yours, basically you shouldn't say it—if you say it, you're wrong!'...This was certainly something his parents taught him before and now I fear that he will already have taught his son, so even the children" [1].

Lu Xun does not give out much details about this man but only his ages, a twenty-year-old youth. He used symbolism in this paragraph as he used this man to represent all the contemporary youth. This man clearly has a powerful stereotype in his mind that eating people is the right thing. Out of people's imagination, the madman keeps questioning this man with great courage. It leads to the question that whether courage exists among people, and whether people who are considered to be normal in daily life possess courage. In fact, everyone has this ability to question others as well as the logic of asking the question in that crowds are usually thinking. However, as an attitude in life, it is not enough to bring courage to life as a principle of oneself. People are unwilling to face this courage in the structure of self-castration, which means giving up certain inner persistence in order to gain external profits. Then, whether the people who are willing to question are abnormal or those people who can not, dialogue like this could readily reveal a survival state of specie and a state of intentional avoidance. Readers would be impressed by this kind of dialogue and it often appears in literature.

2.2. Relationships of the Characters

The relationship is another crucial factor in literature as it shows people's inner thoughts when the author processes the relationships between characters. There is an example in *A MADMAN'S DIARY*.

"Today there is no moon at all; I know this is not good. In the morning, I went outside very cautiously, and old Mr. Zhao had a strange look in his eyes: It seemed that he feared me, or seemed that he wanted to hurt me. There were another seven or eight people, whispering in each other's ears, discussing me.....I was then chilled from

head to toe, knowing they were making arrangements, and that everything was already in place" [1].

By quoting this paragraph, it enables people to try to look through the inner state of the characters because it can reflect the internal thought structure of the character, which is the contact point for observing human nature. To describe the character who is in a relationship that is being discussed, a person facing his/her state is beginning to think, and the person who speaks it out is facing rejection. The self-consciousness of the literary character is extracted in the culture, so it is authentic, even more universal.

2.3. Change of Scenes

The next part is the change of scenes. It is common to see that the author usually uses the switch scenes to show the extension of the character's inner thought in Lu Xun's literature. "It is pitch black, and I do not know if it is day or night. The Zhao's dog has started barking again. The fierceness of a lion, the timidity of a rabbit, the cunning of a fox..." [1]. In this scene, the readers could see the self-consciousness, the change of a character's inner thought, and the tension of the external world. The inner thought would change along with the change of different scenes. For example, when the scene demonstrates a dark situation with a limited surviving sources, the characters might reveal their weakness of human nature such as Greed and lust. Literature does not need to give out a specific answer, but it would always reflect the hidden exquisiteness of the soul of a character. What words bring to readers is the spiritual portrayal of the characters, and that is what Lu Xun's words reflect exactly.

2.4. Change of Language Environment

Lastly, the change in the language environment also plays a crucial role in literature. Another quote from *A MADMAN'S DIARY* is as follows.

"I can't think. A place where people have been eaten constantly for four thousand years, today, I finally understand that I have been mixed up in it for many years.....It is not certain that, unwittingly, I did not eat a few pieces of my little sister's flesh, and now it is my turn. Me, with a four thousand year history of eating people...although at the time I didn't know, I now understand; it is hard to face real humans! Children who have not yet eaten people...or have they? Save the children..." [1].

Most of the readers remember the last three words because of the change in the language environment. Through analyzing, it can be known that the quote forms three layers. First, it uses the thought of an abnormal person. In addition to that, it creates a mental language environment of a social structure. Third, it provides readers an environment to feel themselves. The transformations between these three layers are connected, which is determined by the literature functions.

When Lu Xun posted these works, it was not only a chaos, but also an intersecting period that new ideas and traditional thoughts competed intensively. While other writers were encouraging people to learn from Western culture, he was committed to point out Chinese's weakness and numbness. He is the first writer who applied vernacular in his works. What is more, he set off the waves to criticize Chinese's traditions and obsolete thoughts. His rebellious spirit, which is influenced by Renaissance, Enlightenment and modernist thought, makes the study of human nature intuitive.

3. DISCUSSION

Based on those four factors above, a brief answer about how human nature forms in culture and literature can be gained. Firstly, human nature has basic commonalities. There are four perspectives to elaborate on the commonalities, which are constituted by a sense of safe, shame, fear, and anxiety. When people do not form their thinking structure, they will trade their safeness with servility, which means to give up their authority of gaming with others. One of the simple examples is showed in the autocratic system. Officers with powerful authorities would press their people with plentiful hard workings. In order to avoid troubles and punishments, people usually choose to obey those officers unreasonable request even though they would lose their rights to rebel and argue because the fear of powers are rooted in the deeper part of their mind, which is the origin of the servility of an ethnic. It formed a continuity that even Chinese's land was dominated by foreign, they chose to follow instead of fight against to it until the revolution started. Meanwhile, shame is cultivated within a culture. When a personal legitimacy is not established, people could only use moral to bind themselves and others, which means that the moral is able to eat people as what in *A MADMAN'S DIARY* said. In addition to that, people always live with fear. Most of the time, people with fear would choose to gather others together, with wishes that other people could solve problems for them. The last one is anxiety, which refers to the state that a person could not control his/her fate. People's powerlessness of solving a problem is a result of losing control of fate.

Secondly, the literature provides the characters, scenes, relationships, and language environment for readers to see the inner structure of a period or a society.

Thirdly, when we take *A MADMAN'S DIARY* as an example, the so-called "servility, moral that can eat people, indifference, and autistic" problems refer to a result of domesticated Chinese species formed in an authoritarian culture. The commonality of human nature reacts differently in different cultures, just like a seed planted in different soil would grow into appearances [2], so are the people. Different characters of human nature are revealed in a diverse cultural background. For example, the Chinese have Chinese ethnicity, while Americans have their own race.

4. CONCLUSION

Through the above discussion, it can be understood that human nature is affected by the social and cultural context in which one lives, even though culture itself is created by human life. Human nature is visible because the basic laws of the inner psychological structure of the individual are visible. Through the study of language, mythology and customs, one will understand the interaction among individuals, society and culture. The observation of internal structure of human nature and psychology, literature, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and other disciplines interpenetrate and influence each other. Literature is regarded as the starting point to explore the effect of culture on human psychology and behavior.

In the current global economy and technological integration, cultural conservatism prevails, and conflicts, misunderstandings, and contradictions between cultures will deepen. It is necessary to pay attention to how the communication between people can get a better way under such a scene. Taking the literature of the Republic of China as the starting point, observing the national character of the Chinese people and demonstrating the effectiveness of the observation model are what this article aiming at. The author would conduct more studies about influential modern Chinese literature in the future.

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