

# The Buddhist Narration in Chen Ruoxi's "The Lotus of Wisdom"

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## ABSTRACT

Chen Ruoxi's "The Lotus of Wisdom" embodies the distinctive characteristics of Buddhist narration. The novel is based on a Buddhist temple, showing the emptiness and impermanence of life, the suffering of life, and the Buddhist thought of seeking liberation, depicting the main characters who converted to Buddhism in order to relieve pain and lead to peace of mind, and thinking about the practical significance of Buddhism: Buddhism contributes to the construction of ecological civilization and affects people's mental health and spiritual peace. The characteristics of Buddhism make the novel achieve a high artistic achievement.

**Keywords:** Chen Ruoxi, "The Lotus of Wisdom", Buddhism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Chen Ruoxi's "The Lotus of Wisdom" (2001) is a Buddhist novel to some extent. Buddhist thought is an important part of Chinese culture. Buddhism has had a wide range of influences in Chinese history and has had a profound impact on the daily lives of all classes. Until modern times, Buddhist belief is not thriving, but the influence of Buddhism on the people of Taiwan can be seen everywhere. Chen Ruoxi doesn't formally convert to Buddhism. However, Buddhist thoughts have a lot of influence on her. From her works, people can see that she is deeply influenced by Buddhism. The theme, subject matter and language of "The Lotus of Wisdom" borrow a lot from Buddhism, and the work is permeated with a strong Buddhist complex.

## 2. BUDDHIST THOUGHT

"The Lotus of Wisdom" shows the emptiness and impermanence of secular life. This kind of "emptiness" thinking is the outpouring of the Buddhist "observing emptiness" thought. The person who most frequently laments the impermanence of life is Meixin. Meixin lives in Taipei, a prosperous city. Originally, she wanted to show her capabilities in city life and enjoy the feasting city life. However, Meixin encountered the impermanence experience of losing her child, and this kind of impermanence is so rapid. "Impermanence is not a process with something first and nothing then, but the instant birth and death of phenomena — life itself is

instant birth and death." [1] The ups and downs of life made Meixin face the challenges of weal and woe, life and death, and gains and losses, and deeply felt that life was an illusion and everything was nothingness.

The basic point of Buddhist doctrine is to judge life as "suffering", human life and existence as "suffering", and life as suffering. People are greedy for survival, afraid of death, and prefer to enjoy rather than be weather-beaten. But in fact, the sorrow in the world is far greater than the comfort. In "The Lotus of Wisdom", Meihui experienced the suffering of living. She suffered a lot: the family with unsound parents, the horror of the stepfather, the death of the lover, the husband's domestic violence and affair after marriage, and the hardship of divorce. In a short life, pain already accounted for more than half of her life. Meihui resonated with Buddhism, just as she suffered a lot.

Du Achun experienced the suffering of getting old. When Du Achun got old, her own marriage was unfortunate. Her eldest daughter converted to Buddhism, her second daughter lost her son, and her younger son was far away from home. The children made her extremely worried and sad and painful. She was unaccompanied in her later years, and it was extremely difficult to reunite with her children. Leaning on the door to see the return of her children, she was disappointed and lonely at last.

Meixin experienced the suffering of death. Meixin was originally a very optimistic person who loved life, loved makeup, and loved having a love affair. However, her only son who left home when he was a teenager was

suddenly killed in a car accident. As a mother and a son, they were separated by death even without saying goodbye. The pain of death changed Meixin tremendously.

Meixin suffered from the pain brought by the one she hated. Her resentment towards her stepfather accumulated over the years, and she couldn't forgive him. She went through the pain of parting from her beloved. Du Achun separated from her lover when she was young, and this kind of pain was Du Achun's lifelong suffering. She went through the suffering of not-getting. Meixin sought love, but was unable to find it. "People are born with desires, and whether they are satisfied or not makes people deeply miserable." [2] And these pains often do not exist alone, but overstock in heart at the same time. The narrative of suffering is one of the eternal themes of literature, and the narration of suffering is a manifestation of the essence of life in literature.

The basic purpose of Buddhism is to make people free from life. "Life itself is an aggregation of all sufferings. To this end, it is necessary to explore the causes of pain and the ways to eliminate it, in order to achieve the so-called state of absolute peace and painless liberation." [3] Embracing Buddhism can relieve people from suffering. The image of Meihui shows that people's tolerance for suffering is strengthened by their belief in Buddhism, and they can adopt an optimistic attitude towards the world's life and death.

The Buddhist accepts the influence of Buddhism and understands life, so as to relieve the grief of life and abandon the worries of the secular world. Du Achun used the Buddhist temple as her home for more than ten years. Because in the Buddhist temple, one can get the care of the Buddhist, there are many activities in the Buddhist temple, and the feeling of loneliness is much less. And she learned to cherish her blessings and had the feeling of requiting favors. Embracing Buddhism can bring blessings, and regarding life and death as unimportant can bring relief. "Life is impermanent, those who live will die, and those who have will lose; those who arise from the predestined relationship must trade with impermanence. This is an ironclad law of nature, and no one can change it." [4] Facing the severe pain of life and death, the feeling of powerlessness has eased, and one can better face the parting for ever of life.

Reading Chen Ruoxi's novels, the penetration and infiltration of Buddhist doctrines such as mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and fraternity is consistent. Chinese Buddhism respects the spirit of compassion. Buddhists break away from the shackles of the world but have the feeling of benefiting the mankind. Buddhists comfort people's mind and help the poor. Chengyi helped the women in urgent need, and used an anonymous donation of 300,000 yuan to help child prostitutes. The sum of money was used as social relief

to help aboriginal women caught in a fire. When someone said that they wanted to help Taiwan, Chengyi didn't think so. She believed that religion should surpass politics, and go wherever there is an emergency, embodying the Buddha's great wish of "Wu Yuan Tong Ci, Tong Ti Da Bei (The Bodhisattva will benefit all sentient beings equally, without distinction and without conditions, which is a truly great compassion)". The Buddhist idea of equality and compassion is also a kind of broad love.

### **3. PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN BUDDHISM**

In the novel "The Lotus of Wisdom", Buddhism thought can be said to be fully reflected in the protagonist Meihui. The Buddhists cultivated in the temple where kindness and love are concentrated are simple, upright, sincere, fair and full of love. Chengyi (Du Meihui) is a typical representative. When Du Meihui lived to 26 years old and experienced childbirth and marriage crisis, despite being bored and pessimistic about the world, she didn't blame anyone, but sighed about living a hard life. Du Meihui, who had never gone to temples to burn incense and worshipped Buddha before, was dragged to attend a dharma assembly in Taichung on Tomb-Sweeping Day. She burst into tears when she heard a master's speech. Her marriage failed and she couldn't return home. Buddhism was her last life preserver. In this way, Du Meihui converted to Buddhism and had a religious name, Chengyi. Chengyi was very capable, helping her mother cook since she was a child, and after marrying, she was also used to cooking hodgepodge dishes. The food of dozens of monks in the whole temple was not at all troublesome to her, and Hai Guang Temple's reputation for delicious food had spread like wildfire. Because the vegetarian food was delicious, believers liked to come to the Hai Guang Temple for dharma assembly, and the incense there was more prosperous; the incense was prosperous, and the sesame oil money also rose with the corresponding rise, which benefited the financial affairs of the temple a lot. Chengyi didn't forget to make some soft and easy-to-melt soups for her master, and was filial to her master. She was tireless and eager to study Buddhism. She read the scriptures as soon as she had time, and quickly set the record for the person borrowing most books in the library. The United States is so remote and unfamiliar, how difficult it is for a yellow-faced bhikkhuni to survive among a group of white students, let alone academic success, but Chengyi made it. She relied on the 300 yuan a month issued by the Monastic Manger to buy her necessities, and often felt the draught. But she thought the monk should be so, and she didn't think it as suffering. Chengyi had prestige. Chengxi and Chengyi converted to the Buddhism at the same time. Chengxi were very envious of Chengyi's fast promotion, but not jealous. From the

ture, she had an admiration for Chengyi. Chengyi's dharma-laksana is solemn and beautiful, and she treats others with gentleness. She lost her father since childhood, and subconsciously, Chengxi recognized Chengyi as her mother subconsciously. There was deep love between the elder sister and the younger brother. The younger brother first wrote a letter to the eldest sister by the order of his mother, and then he became interested in writing letters. He also sent news about Puli in the mountain city from time to time, and conveyed his thoughts and feelings through paper and pen. Chengyi would reply to every letter she received, advising her brother to be forbearing and conciliatory and study hard.

Chengyi gained the prestige of Buddhism heirs. When the old monk passed away, he passed on her mantle and she became the abbot of Hai Guang Temple. Chengyi's words were lucid and decisive, yet so gentle and calm. She was neither forceful nor persistent. The girl who had been so weak and sad that she didn't want to live, was now cultivated into a compassionate and wise nun. Kierkegaard divided the spiritual realm into three stages, namely, the aesthetic realm, the moral realm, and the religious realm. Chengyi can be said to reach the third level, that is, the highest level of life. In the novel, the Buddhist temple is the geographic space of the characters' activities. For people, space is not only an objective form of material existence, but also a manifestation of human emotional value.

Monk Chengqing was a master, and this master owned the style of a master. Monk Chengqing was merciful. When Chengxi was disillusioned with the mortal world, she donated 200,000 yuan of sesame oil money. While Chengyi converted to the Buddhism empty-handed, but the master treated her the same. Master Chengqing was an elder that Chengyi could talk about anything with, and she was willing to say other worries. Master was also broad-minded and compassionate towards others. Monk Chengqing strived to promote the Buddha dharma. When he was on the mainland, he was a believer of Master Taixu. Since entering and hosting Hai Guang Temple, he always wanted to establish a Buddhist academy to promote the "Buddhism of life" of the master.

Du Meixin had a positive and enthusiastic attitude towards life. Meixin was caress and lived with the mentality that life should be enjoyed in time. Mr. Wu was a section chief of the provincial government, accidentally going to the lounge with someone and meeting Meixin, and chased after her since then. Knowing that he had a family, Meixin unexpectedly into his arms like a flying moth darting into the fire. And he even promised to build a fragrant house for her the year before. Meixin's pursuit of love was always unsatisfactory. She and Mr. Wu's son grew up so much, but his registered permanent residence couldn't even be registered in Wu's family. The column on the ID card

was the same as his mother, with "father unknown". Mr. Wu delayed Meixin until she was thirty-six years old and still had no plans to marry. The death of her son in a car accident was a huge blow to Meixin. Meixin lost her longing and dreams, and felt that all her hard work was meaningless, including love and fame.

Du Achun's love was transitory and fleeting, and she suffered from the unsatisfactory marriage. She and her first husband had mutual affinity, with a solemn pledge of love. But when Meixin was just born, Du Achun's husband died after a serious illness. The three, mother and daughters, really couldn't support it. Therefore, Du Achun had to marry Luo Hanjiao from other provinces, however, the family broke down, causing Meihui to escape and become a nun. Du Achun felt very painful inwardly. In fact, her first husband actually went to the mainland to find relatives, and his family members were kept in the dark. Fortunately, after many years of separation, she finally relieved the humiliation and torture of being cheated. Some sad things are like wine in a wine cellar, the taste will only get stronger as it ages.

#### **4. MODERNIZATION OF BUDDHISM**

In modern times, Buddhism should keep up with the development of the times. The Buddhism in "The Lotus of Wisdom" is already a writing of modern Buddhism. The space of Hai Guang Temple has religious attributes and is a symbol of Buddhism and Buddha dharma. As Liu Yuxi said, "Any mountain can be famous with the presence of an immortal, and any river can be holy with the presence of a dragon", there are eminent monks in Hai Guang Temple, which enhances the sacredness of this place. The atmosphere of the temple is pious, and the conditions of the Buddhist temple are difficult and not satisfactory. One can only keep on through overcoming various difficulties. Buddhists have always had a tradition of seeking a master and Dharma.

The pabbajja ceremony has been modernized. The monks observe the five precepts: no killing, no telling lies, no stealing, no adultery, and no drinking. Buddhism advocates not to kill, and also to free captive animals, which is beneficial to the protection of animals. Buddhism advocates eating vegetarian food, which is good for health. Belief in Buddhism makes people feel a kind of primitive beauty of human nature. In addition to appearing in the novel as a true geographic reference, the temple has also become an important component for the novel to exaggerate the aesthetic atmosphere and show the Buddhist meaning because of its unique Buddhist culture.

"From the perspective of the basic structure of Chinese traditional culture, Buddhism has a cultural body that coexists harmoniously with Confucianism and Taoism, carries elements of Confucianism and Taoism,

and is the carrier of Chinese traditional culture." [5] Buddhism is conducive to the construction of ecological civilization. Ecological civilization has attracted everyone's attention. The deterioration of the ecological environment has cruelly endangered the survival and development of mankind, and industrial civilization has been criticized. From the perspective of aesthetics, "anthropocentrism" brutally suppresses nature and its beauty. The Buddhist place is a place with an excellent natural environment, while the Hai Guang Temple in Danshui is a pure land. In the life of Hai Guang Temple, with the blue sky, white clouds, the flowing water of the temple, the clear sounds of flowers and trees, and the sound of sandalwood bells, everything is quiet, and the atmosphere of leisure and tranquility is fully displayed. There are beautiful scenes everywhere, and everyone has Buddha nature. People there return to simplicity, returning to the embrace of nature.

Buddhism can promote the healthy development of modern ethics. Buddhism advocates to exterminate the evil and follow the good, and doing the good is the right way. The fundamental principle of Buddhist moral behavior is to do no evil and to do all good things. This is based on the principle of karma. Buddhism also advocates filial piety. The filial piety of Buddhism is not only consistent with that of Confucianism, but even surpasses that of Confucianism. Buddhism has never denied the tenderness of parent-child love, sister's love, and family affection. In "The Lotus of Wisdom", people will be moved by the profound affection of Meihui's family. This is the deepest companionship. Although plain and simple, it is the most tender moment.

Belief in Buddhism can reduce material desires. Desire is an inseparable existence that accompanies people, and it is also an existence that everyone needs to face. People often use "spirit and flesh" to compare the relationship between culture and desire. Nowadays, minimizing or even eliminating the destructive power of desire to society and individual lives, and striving to build a good social atmosphere to find a poetic habitat for the human soul, are major issues that need to be solved urgently before mankind. The function of believing in Buddhism is presented here.

Religion is very important for the spiritual comfort of people. "The ultimate destination or the highest state or the goal of consummation pursued by Buddhism is the thorough, complete, and ultimate freedom of man." [6] People who believe in Buddhism are free, and Buddhism can make people believe in and respect freedom. As a category of existentialism, freedom is the self-transcendence of life existence and the pursuit and realization of life ideals. This kind of innocent life attitude of letting fate take its course is deeply rooted in people's spiritual world.

The fundamental purpose of human beings is not to increase the utilitarian nature of life, but to enrich the

aesthetics of life and to play an unadorned piano to express feelings. This reflects people's comfortable attitude towards life. The Buddhist space has become a true geographic reference, rendering an aesthetic atmosphere of purity and inaction. Hai Guang Temple has aesthetic value. Hai Guang Temple is located on the mountainside of Datun. Quiet trees, morning mist and setting sun are all wonderful scenery. Therefore, it has always been a favorite recreational place for Danshui people. Buddhism also has some problems. Modern Buddhism is more secular, and its ranks of monks and nuns continue to expand, and it has also become a place to shelter evil people and countenance evil practices.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, Chen Ruoxi's "The Lotus of Wisdom" is a Buddhist novel to some extent. The novel reveals distinctive Buddhist ideas, and the main characters converted to Buddhism and became devout Buddhist believers. It also thinks about the practical significance of Buddhism, and believes that Buddhism has practical guiding significance and is beneficial to ecology, ethics, and soul.

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