

Analysis of "Orphan of China" and French Neoclassical Drama from the Perspective of Theme and Structure Plot

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ABSTRACT

In the 18th-century, Yuan Zaju (Chinese drama) "Orphan of Zhao" was translated and transmitted to France by the French missionary Marjós é. The philosopher and playwright Voltaire adapted the play and staged it in France. Why Voltaire, a pioneer of French thought adapted this play, and how to adapt it and what are the similarities and differences with Yuan Zaju "Orphan of Zhao", are the points that this paper attempts to discuss. This paper uses primary and secondary data and compares and analyzes the similarities and differences between the two dramas from the perspective of theme and structure plot. Finally, this paper concludes that Voltaire only chose to accept themes related to China, and in terms of the character setting, plot and structure, the play still embodies the style of French Neoclassical drama.

Keywords: "Orphan of the Zhao", Yuan Zaju, "Orphan of China", Voltaire, Classical unities, Neoclassicism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Voltaire's drama "Orphan of China" was created in the 18th century and adapted from the Chinese drama "Orphan of the Zhao". The full name is "The Revenge of Orphan of Zhao", created by Chinese dramatist Ji Junxiang from the Yuan Dynasty (1127-1368). In the 18th century France Father Marose translated it into French, and the Chinese scholar Fan Cunzhong called it "the first Chinese drama introduced to Europe; as far as the eighteenth century, it was the only Chinese drama circulating in Europe" [1]. The French thinker and writer Voltaire adapted the play and named it "Orphan of China-A Five Acts Play of Confucius Theory". In previous studies, the study of "Orphan of China" mainly focused on the understanding of Confucianism, and comparative studies of Chinese Confucianism and French rationalism, and Voltaire's misunderstanding of Chinese Confucianism. There was less research on the interaction between drama structure and content. French drama in the 18th century was in the period of Neoclassicism. French drama represented by Pierre Corneille, Racine and Molière used

rationality and the Classical Unities to write plays, pushing French Neoclassicism drama to the peak. Also, there is a dynamic process of mutual influence between structure and content in Voltaire's "Orphan of China", and he also made a large-scale adaptation of "Orphan of the Zhao".

This paper attempts to focus on the perspective of the interaction between themes and structures, discussing the role of the theory of "Classical Unities" in creating this drama. This paper will use text reading and literary theory to analyze the script by combining primary, secondary data and other documents. Hoping that by doing this research, the literary discussion between China and France in the eighteenth century will be discussed comprehensively in more detail.

2. COMPARISON OF THE THEMES OF "ORPHAN OF ZHAO" AND "ORPHAN OF CHINA"

2.1 *"Loyalty" and "Righteousness" in "Orphan of Zhao"*

"Orphan of Zhao" is based on historical events, which occurred in the third year of Jin Jinggong (597 BC) in the Spring and Autumn Period. The earliest historical record appeared in the history book "Chun Qiu". The plot is relatively simple and close to historical facts. In the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC-8 AD), Sima Qian in the historical book "Shi Ji" adapted to create heroic images such as Cheng Ying and Gongsun Chujiu. Yuan Zaju "The Great Revenge of the Orphan of the Zhao" takes place in the Jin Kingdom (now in northwestern China). The main characters include the positive character Jin Linggong, the king of the Jin Kingdom, the minister Zhao Dun and his son Zhao Shuo, Zhao Shuo's friend Cheng Ying, and a villain, the power minister Tu Anjia. Tu Anjia chased down Zhao Dun and left him in the wild, forcing his son Zhao Shuo to death. Zhao Shuo's friend Cheng Ying took his posthumous son Zhao's orphan to escape. After the general Han Jue let Cheng Ying away, Gongsun Chujiu was arrested after helping Cheng Ying drop the Zhao's orphan and died generously. Cheng Ying's biological son pretended to be the Zhao's orphan and died. Twenty years later, Cheng Ying informed the orphan of Zhao of the killing of the Zhao Shuo by the Tu family. Orphan of Zhao killed the Tu Anjia finally.

The themes of the drama focused on "righteousness" and "loyalty". "Righteousness" and "loyalty" are important concepts of Chinese Confucianism related to the principles of human ethics and morality in ancient China. The elemental idea of Confucianism is "benevolence", which represents kindness. It means that we should always consider from the standpoint of others, so as to achieve a state of harmony with others. "Righteousness" is based on "benevolence" and is used in the relationship between the emperor and his ministers, friends, etc. It contains a kind of retribution psychology. When the emperor or friend helps the individual, it is a gift that is implemented in return. One should help the king or friend at a certain time, even if the help is not necessarily moral in the eyes of others. The Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan believes that "righteousness is the right thing to do, that is, it should be. It is an absolute order. Everyone in the

society has certain things that should be done. You must do it because you do things that are morally right" [2]. In the play, Gongsun Chujiu sacrificed his own life to help Cheng Ying and Zhao's orphan get rid of enemies. It is considered "righteous". "Loyalty" means integrity. In the relationship between superiors and subordinates, ministers need to be responsible to the emperor, to be "loyal". What Cheng Ying helped Zhao orphans demonstrated was a kind of "loyalty" to Zhao Shuo, because as a courtier of the emperor, he should do his best for the emperor.

2.2 *"Rationality" and "Ethics" in "Orphan of China": Five Acts of Confucius*

At the end of China's Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), Genghis Khan captured Beijing. Before Emperor Song's death, Zhang Ti was entrusted Emperor Song's son to the minister. Genghis Khan searched for orphan of Song Dynasty after hearing the news. Zhang Ti decided to use his biological son to replace the orphan of Song Dynasty. His wife Idamy both supported and opposed her husband's decision. She told Genghis Khan the truth. Genghis Khan threatened to propose to her. Idamy rejected the forced marriage of the conquerors and actively saved the orphans. At the same time, Zhang Ti was arrested and imprisoned. After failing to save the orphan, Idamy was also arrested and imprisoned. She decided to suicide herself with her husband. Shocked and ashamed, Genghis Khan finally ordered the pardon of Zhang Ti and his wife. The script ends with Genghis Khan's pleading for Zhang Ti to stay in the palace to teach the Yuan Dynasty officials with the highly civilized Chinese nation.

The 18th century in France was a period of political change and ideological activity. France was ruled by theocracy for a long time, and the emergence of Descartes' rationalism laid a philosophical foundation for "rational" thinking. Voltaire is one of the representatives who advocated "rationality" against theocracy, and many of Voltaire's literary works are based on such ideas. "Orphan of China" is Voltaire's explanation of Eastern Confucianism to express his appreciation for Confucian ethics and morality. In his letter to his friends, he mentioned many times that the purpose of creating this play is to "teaching the morals of Confucius." It is the "five-act Confucian moral play" [3], he believed that Chinese people who abide by Confucianism have moral virtues,

and they get along with each other in an orderly manner and respect each other. This kind of virtue was exactly what France needed to learn at the time. Voltaire called Confucius "the earliest master of ethics" and "an ancient philosopher who taught his descendants to observe virtues". He emphasized to Confucianism that the younger generations bowed their heads to the elders and worshipped their ancestors on festivals as "the most natural and sacred rule. Etiquette can establish restraint and integrity in the entire nation, so that the folk customs are both solemn and elegant. The Chinese have the most profound understanding, the most meticulous cultivation and the most dedicated to perfection. The things are morality and law. Sons and daughters honoring their fathers is the foundation of the country. In addition to criminalizing crimes, the law is also used to reward good deeds" [4]. In Voltaire's view, China's "Li" thinking is rational. "Ritual" represents restraint, restraining desire and impulsive behavior to become rational. The Chinese morality formed by "ritual" is conducive to the formation of a well-ordered society in China. This is where the Song Dynasty is more advanced than the Mongolian. Voltaire expressed his views on Confucianism with the help of the character Genghis Khan in the play: "I have seen an ancient nation with vast land, abundant resources, dexterity and hard work. The authority of successive emperors is based on great wisdom, even the monarchs of neighboring countries. Submissively, they can rule the world without force, and govern the country with good customs and virtues"[5]. In addition, in "Orphan of China", the main characters talk about rationality, fairness and justice. These concepts are western philosophical concepts, which are obviously very different from Eastern Confucianism. Therefore, the Confucianism in Voltaire's eyes is the "Confucianism" he chose to accept, which contains his political vision for France.

2.3 Comparison of Themes

The themes of the two plays are very different, rooted in the different cultural contexts of the east and the west. Although Voltaire tried to express Eastern philosophical thought through drama, his purpose was still to express his country's political demands.

3. COMPARISON OF THE STRUCTURE OF "ORPHAN OF ZHAO" AND "ORPHAN OF CHINA"

3.1 "Orphan of Zhao" — "Qu" and Plot

Yuan Zaju is a form of drama that emerged in northern China during the Yuan Dynasty (1271AD-1368AD). Yuan Zaju consists of 5-6 scenes, called "zhe", wedge, the original meaning is woodwork and wedging into tenon to make it firm. In Zaju, its role is sometimes to supplement the plot, sometimes to introduce characters, and meet when some content is inconvenient to appear in a certain compromise, a wedge can also be used. The structure of Yuan Zaju is generally fourfold and one wedge, and the script consists of three parts: Qu, Bai and Ke. Qu is the singing part in Zaju. Ke is the action performed in Yuan Zaju. Bai refers to the dialogue in dramas, and it is also called Dao Bai. The development of the plot and the shaping of the characters play an important role. In Yuan Zaju, music plays an important role. The main characters express their personality characteristics and the progress of the plot is mostly completed through music. The protagonist can choose different tunes according to the plot and situation. The singing is slow and the rhythm is also slow. There is a big difference in western drama with lines as the main form of expression. The overall development of Yuan Zaju does not pay attention to the plot, but pays more attention to the expression of the characters' feelings, and the audience's emotions are relieved and released during the process of listening to the music. Yuan Zaju has no logical rules for plot development, so the time and place of the event can span a wide range.

3.2 "Orphan of China" — "Classical Unities" and Plot

Classical Unities is the creative principle of French neoclassical drama in the 17th century. The clearest explanation appears in Boileau's "Poetic Art", "we must obey its norms for reason, and we require the development of the plot to be arranged artistically. It takes one place to complete a story in one day, and maintains the fullness of the stage from the beginning to the end" [6]. In other words, there are elements of the classical unities: the time is within a day, the place is in the same place, and the plot is unified. This is based on the French dramatist's understanding of the ancient Greek

philosopher's definition of art: art is an imitation of reality. Making the drama happen on the same day and in the same place is in line with people's cognitive habits of life, and is conducive to better imitating reality, so as to help the audience better understand the plot. Among the three elements, the most important is the unification of the plot. When talking about tragedy in Aristotle's "Poetics", he said, "Plot is the basis of tragedy and has a tragedy-like soul" [7]. French dramatist Lessing believes that "the unification of action is the first principle of the ancients, and the unification of time. The same place is just a continuation of it" [8]. Time and place are required to be unified to ensure that the mission action is logical. Voltaire was also affected by the classical unities. Voltaire expressed his dissatisfaction with the "Orphan of China" that does not conform to the classical unities: "The Orphan of Zhao is full of arrogance compared to the good works of France at the time. The plot extended to twenty-five years, just like the freak dramas of Shakespeare and Rob de Vega, which people call tragedy; it is a pile of incredible events", but it lacks other beauty: the unity of time and plot, the expression of emotions, the depiction of customs, intense debate, rationality, and enthusiasm" [9].

Voltaire set the plot of "Chinese Orphan" in the Song Dynasty, which was 1,000 years later than Han, shortened 25 years to a day and night, deleted the last two parts of "Orphan of Zhao", and only retained the plot of the first two parts, and added the love factor makes "Orphan of China" completely another drama.

3.3 Comparison of Structures

In terms of the composition of the script, the traditions of these two dramas are different: Yuan Zaju mainly expresses through singing, slow adjustment of the song, and the main focus of the drama is on the lyrical aspect; western drama is based on dialogue, and the epic tradition makes the drama pay more attention to plot development and rhythm. In terms of plot, Yuan Zaju does not pay attention to the development of plot, while western drama puts the logic of plot in the first place.

4. "ORPHAN OF CHINA" AND FRENCH NEOCLASSICAL DRAMA

"Classicism" occurred in ancient Greece and Rome, while neoclassicism emerged in Europe in the 18th century, which tends to shape some models

in a relatively balanced civilization that people can generally agree with. The language of Classicism is usually very vivid and full of humanistic care. Classicism is not affected by personal emotions and is objective. Rationality, court aristocratic life is the main feature. In the 17th century, the French Louis XIV period was in the heyday of royal power, advocating the elegant style of the court, pursuing elegant language, rational restraint and sensibility, and the creative style must conform to the trinity and become a drama. Voltaire's "Orphan of China" was created in accordance with the requirements of neoclassicism.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, Voltaire's "Orphan of China" only accepted the theme of the Chinese Yuan Zaju "Orphan of Zhao" — Chinese "Confucianism", and highly praised by the lines of the characters in "Orphan of China" that as a nation of etiquette, China respects the elders and the country is in order, and rational Chinese people are under such norms. However, the concept of "rationality" was one of the creative principles of French Neoclassical drama in the 18th century. In fact, it just uses the Chinese concepts to express Western concepts. Also, the structure of "Orphan of China" still follows the "Classical Unities" creation rule, which is the rule of French neoclassical drama in the 18th century. Therefore, in terms of drama content and structure, "Orphan of China" is still a French neoclassical drama.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Zhongxin Jia.

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