

# On Sun Li's Literary Creation

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## ABSTRACT

Sun Li's creation can be divided into two periods. From the beginning of Sun Li's creation to the starting of the Cultural Revolution, is the early stage of Sun Li's creation; from the end of the Cultural Revolution to the closing of Sun Li's pen in 1995, this is the later stage of Sun Li's creation. The fundamental difference between the early and late stages of Sun Li's creation lies in the different purposes of his two periods. In Sun Li's early stage he created as a "revolutionary spokesperson", while in Sun Li's later stage his creations were "for life".

**Keywords:** Sun Li, spokesperson, for life, early stage, late stage.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sun Li was a famous writer who became prominent during the Yan'an period. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, the number of writers in the liberated areas was not as large as those in the Kuomintang-controlled areas. Sun Li's fame is not only the result of the writer's own efforts and decades of perseverance and diligent practice, but also has a close relationship with the party's years of cultivation in literature and art [1]. Sun Li's fame has indeed won glory for the literature and art in the liberated areas. After liberation, Sun Li's creation was like volcanic eruptions. From 1949 to 1956, it was a harvest period for Sun Li's creation. After 1956, with Sun Li's illness and the beginning of the anti-rightist movement, Sun Li's creation came to a halt [2]. The period of the Cultural Revolution is Sun Li's silence period. From 1956 to 1978, Sun Li's creation stopped for more than twenty years. It was not until the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of reform and opening up that Sun Li's creation restarted. This is the later stage of Sun Li's creation which lasted until 1995 when Sun Li sealed his pen.

## 2. SUN LI'S PRELIMINARY CREATION AS A 'SPOKESPERSON'

Of all the ancient Chinese prose writers, Sun Li liked Liu Zongyuan and Ouyang Xiu the most [3]. Sun Li said that prose should be the literature expressing of the author's thoughts. He also said that writers in the liberated areas should be spokespersons for the people. Thoughts here refer to the Marxist theories. And

"people's spokesperson" have the same meaning that the author should have the proletarian outlooks and thoughts, expressing the people's thoughts and feelings. Both the two expressions have the same meaning, demonstrating his conscientious pursuit.

We can specifically analyze how Sun Li's identity as a spokesperson was realized.

The realization of the identity of the spokesperson, first of all, lies in the choice of life. Life is complicated, beautiful as well as ugly. What the writer sees and hears is only a small part of life. Compared with the rich and complicated life, the writer's experience can only be a drop of water in the ocean. Even so, what the author writes into the work can only be a small part of the writer's own real life and emotional life. When the author writes those life experiences into his works, what he writes is the result of his choice, the result of his elimination and identification. It can even be said that all the writers' skills are manifested in selection, especially revolutionary realist writers. If the naturalist writer is a bystander of life, then the revolutionary realist writer is the guide and educator of life, and he plays the role of a teacher. "Hide the evil and promote the good" is the basic principle for teachers to educate students. The following is a paragraph in Sun Li's often quoted remarks:

*Seeing the ultimate in truth, goodness and beauty, I wrote some works. Seeing the extreme of evil, I don't want to write. I have a deep experience with those evil things, which can be said to be deeply rooted in my heart. But I don't want to write those things, and I don't want to recall them[4].*

This is exactly the principle and guiding ideology of Sun Li's early creation. This guiding principle not only conforms to Mao Zedong's "Speech at the Yan'an Literary Forum", but also conforms to Sun Li's "Conscience", which determines the chanting characteristics of Sun Li's early works. The 29 stories and 31 essays in "The Stories of Baiyangdian", except for "The Story of Lazy Horse" and "The Bell", all feature positive or advanced characters[5]. It can be said that the author of these works is the spokesperson of the Party or the spokesperson of the people. The purpose of the creation of these works is to eulogize the light, to lash out the ugliness, and to cooperate with the Party's policy and line.

The realization of the identity of the spokesperson also lies in the depiction of the images of all classes and parties. From the perspective of imageology, Sun Li's early creations also conform to his identity as the party's spokesperson. Imageology is a new subject developed in Europe. It is founded by the master of comparative literature Jean Marie Carré, and has now become a prominent term in comparative literature studies. In any era, people's imagination of society is based on classification and naming: poor, rich, gentlemen, villains, commoners, princes, generals, scholars, literati, writers, etc.. These are collection concepts which are the result of categorizing and naming of people. In modern China, many ancient concepts have become obsolete and abandoned. New concepts have emerged with the tremendous changes in society and the rise of new social forces, occupying an increasingly important position in the modern knowledge buildings. The proletariat, the bourgeoisie, traitors, Japanese aggressors, class, etc. are such concepts. The product of such logical thinking forms a historical totality and a strong social consciousness, which tightly controls knowledge production. As an important part of knowledge production, literary creation is also controlled by mainstream consciousness without exception.

Sun Li's creation focuses on describing life in the Liberated Area of Hebei. The Liberated Area of Hebei is the hometown of Sun Li, a place that Sun Li will never forget, and an oasis in Sun Li's heart. Life is the source of creation. For Sun Li, a professional writer, life in his hometown is the source of his creation.

During the War of Resistance Against Japan, the main forces active in central Hebei were the Kuomintang regime, which was the legal regime in China at that time; the anti-Japanese forces led by the Communist Party of China; and the Japanese puppet regimes. These three forces all had their leadership cores. The leading force of the Chinese Communist Party is its Central Committee in Yan'an, the Kuomintang's core is also its Central Committee, and the leading force of the Japanese puppet regime is its puppet government.

In Sun Li's novels, there are very few high-level characters. He writes more about ordinary people. A general purpose of his early novels was to provide a legal basis for the anti-Japanese and Chinese Communists' armed seizure of power. The CCP regime was an absent existence, but had a huge power in Sun Li's novels. It was an invisible hand that pushed China forward. It tightly controlled people's spirits, and thus controlled People's actions. This power had the following characteristics: one was the concealment behind the scenes, which was an absent presence; the second was the immense power, which had the ability to manipulate everything; the third was the sacredness and sublime. On the contrary, most of the enemies in Sun Li's works had the following characteristics: one was incompetence and unpopular, such as the big brother-in-law in "The Bell"; the other was evil and cruel, such as Lin Degui and the old nun in the same work.

### **3. SUN LI'S EARLY REALISM HAS TWO CHARACTERISTICS**

One is to "keep away from politics".

Sun Li advocated "writing away from politics", but "not divorced from politics", which meant "when politics is a concept, you can't express this concept", only "wait for it to penetrate into the lives of the masses, and then you can write the life into your works, of course, the writer's ideological position is also reflected in the works. This is its political tendency. Only when a work is artistic can it be ideological, and ideas are melted into the infectious power of art." The basic meaning of this passage is: authors should write about life, not politics. The relationship between life and politics is the relationship between a big concept and a small concept. Life includes politics, but politics cannot include life. If we put this sentence in the long and complicated relationship history of literature and politics, we will understand that this simple and concise truth is not easy to come by. Many people have spilled their own blood to bring this simple truth to light.

In the long era of imperial autocracy in China, it is a common phenomenon to understand life and literature in a pan-politicized manner. A poet or a scholar is unwilling to take the imperial examination and become an official in the court. In the eyes of the emperor, of course this person can be regarded as an enemy. His performance can be regarded as non-cooperation, as confrontation. Because "all under the sky is the king's land, all the people in the land are the king's subjects", the emperor regarded the entire country as his own private property, and anyone's body can be controlled by the emperor. Anyone who does not want to be an official, of course commits great violation of the emperor's authority. Any behavior within the emperor's power can find a high-sounding reason[6]. However, in modern society, the situation has changed, and the ideas of freedom, equality,

and human rights are deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. There is a strict line between public and private. Violating individual rights and dignity is becoming more and more difficult. Pan-politicization loses its theoretical basis. Politics is politics, and there can be a rich and colorful life outside of politics. People have more and more freedom, as long as they do not violate the law, they can be exempt from sanctions. People are getting more and more away from the pan-politicized way of thinking, and instead take care of life in a poetic and literary way.

In a healthy society, literature is undoubtedly independent and free. Politics can neither require literature as its own tool. Literature also has self-knowledge and no longer assumes political responsibility that it cannot bear. Only when it unloads its heavy burdens, can its free nature be revealed.

Modern Chinese society is not a sound society. In an unsound society, many people will fall in love with literature which is like a beautiful girl. Since she has such charms, why not use her to serve people's professional purpose? Thus revolutionary literature was born. Many writers simply create slogan-style works. This became propaganda rather than literature. This was the alienation of literature.

In the context of revolutionary literature, serving politics was not a question of whether the writer was willing or not, but it was a must. It was the best state of liberated area writers and new Chinese writers to consciously achieve "keeping from politics". It was impossible to express one's true views on politics. What the writers could do was to preserve the original form of life as much as possible while praising them. In fact, the greatest value of new Chinese literature lies in this.

These original forms of life are fresh and truly literary things, and are the core of literature. It is these original forms of life, with multiple psychological, social, political, and historical connotations and unlimited interpretation possibilities, which are the real reasons for left-wing literature to become real literature. These original forms maintain their eternal freshness. Only these original forms have the ability to talk to all readers. And those political tendencies that float on it will be discarded by readers with the development of the times like a stinky rag soaked in partisanship. Politics try to crush this native ecology, but it cannot be crushed. If it is crushed, then literature will die.

In fact, these original forms of life are extremely disruptive. It will not only subvert the political nature of the work itself, but also subvert any rigid political views and political tendencies. What do they support? They support nothing, they only support themselves. If we find a similar term, we can only find one phrase, that is human nature.

The second is the praising realism.

During the liberated area period and after the founding of the People's Republic of China, there were fierce class struggles in the field of literature and art. Both the school of 'art for political sake' and the school of 'art for art's sake' were under the banner of realism. Therefore, almost all writers after the founding of the People's Republic of China can be regarded as realist writers. So, what kind of realism is Sun Li's realism? It is a kind of eulogizing realism. Sun Li's realism is obviously different from the classic realism represented by Balzac and Tolstoy. Sun Li's realism is eulogizing realism. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, Sun Li praised the anti-Japanese soldiers and civilians in the liberated areas. During the War of Liberation and after the founding of the country, Sun Li praised the leadership of the Communist Party and the hard work of the great people.

Of course, Sun Li's works also exposed and criticized some bad things. "The Story of Lazy Horse" exposes an extremely lazy old woman; "Wang Fenggang Buries Alive Anti-Japan Soldiers' Family" exposes the cruel massacre of the Kuomintang against the Anti-Japan soldiers' family; the works written in the land reform period exposes the actions of landlords and rich peasants sabotaging the land reform; and "The Beginning of Wind and Cloud" criticizes traitors and the Kuomintang reactionaries. These expositions and its criticizes are consistent with the party's position. Sun Li's purpose is to sing better. If realism does not exclude the author's subjectivity, then the author's subjectivity is demonstrated as follows: he consciously cooperates with politics; he cooperates with the party's guidelines and policies; he stands along with the Communist Party, observes the world with a proletarian worldview, and enthusiastically praises the party. These are the most obvious feature of Sun Li's subjectivity.

Of course, this feature is not unique to Sun Li. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, almost all the writers kept praising the party, praising socialism, and praising the new proletariat's new ideas. Praise is actually the fundamental difference between Marxist-Leninist realism and Western classic realism.

The appearance of praising realism was the requirement of the times. When Sun Li was a student, he had already laid a solid literary foundation. Then, the flames of the War of Resistance against Japan burned all over the land of Hebei. Sun Li naturally participated in the War of Resistance against Japan and accepted the leadership of the Communist Party. He used literary methods to contribute to the War of Resistance Against Japan. War is an unconventional way of social life. It is a special life with high tension. War calls literature and demands literature, and writers consciously obeyed the needs of war. The War of Resistance Against Japan had two requirements for literature. The first is that literature should focus on praise rather than exposure. Any

government, whether it is in the Kuomintang-ruled area or in the liberated area, whether it is the central government or the border region government, asked literature to serve its political needs. The difference is that, Kuomintang's literature and art policy failed, but the Communist Party's literature and art policy succeeded. The second is that literature should unite the people and fight the enemy. This is the natural requirement of war for literature.

Praising realism inevitably requires the purification of life[7]. Although Sun Li's experience was very complicated and he saw a lot of suffering and evil, he consciously used a net to filter the cruel things. What he captured was the beautiful points in human nature and the beautiful actions of the anti-Japanese soldiers and civilians.

From the end of the Cultural Revolution to the closing of Sun Li's pen in 1995, was the later period of Sun Li's creation. During this period, Sun Li did not write many novels, and he devoted his energy to writing prose. The achievements of Sun Li's later works far surpassed those of his earlier period. Some people have summed up the changes in Sun Li's early and late creations as "from good to evil", "from hot to cold", and "from emotion to reason", which are indeed true and right. But I think, in addition to these changes, there is one more important point, that is, the change from "spokesperson" to "art for life".

True literature is for life. Even for the 'art for art's sake' faction, the ultimate purpose of their literary creation is for life. Sun Li's schooling period was the period when the literary concept of 'art for life' prevailed. After he participated in the Anti-Japanese War, the situation changed. Under the special conditions of the War of Resistance in China, the most important thing was politics and military affairs, 'art for life' changed naturally to 'art for politics'.

In the long run, 'art for politics' can only be a stopgap measure. Any regime, of course, will demand literature to serve it, or at least not to threaten it. But failed regimes without authority have never succeeded in pursuing a policy of 'literature serving politics'. Because literature pursues truth, and politics pursues the stability of governance. Literature and art are eternal, while politics is temporary.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In the decades-long creative career, Sun Li's realism developed with the development of the times and formed his own characteristics. After the reform and opening up, Sun Li's praising realism turned into an exposed and satirical realism. This is also the result of the development of the times and the author's own thought changes.

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