

A Comparative Study of Natsume Soseki's Novels and Lu Xun's Novels

From the Perspective of Criticism and “Yuyu” Thoughts*

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Abstract—Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun are two top-level writers in the world literary in the 20th century. Their works have created new literary genres in their respective countries and are the symbols of modern literature in China and Japan. The works of the two writers are distinctive, and they have strong criticism and harmony. They use the humorous and ironic language to enlighten the public and transform the national character, which has profound practical significance. This paper mainly compares the novels of the two writers, and analyzes the connotation and connection between unique creative methods, expression techniques and their literary views.

Keywords—Natsume Soseki; Lu Xun; novel; criticism; “Yuyu” thought

I. INTRODUCTION

Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun are the few writers in the history of literature in Asia and even the world in the 20th century. They are the symbols of modern literature in China and Japan. Natsume Soseki's works cover novels, poems, travel notes and other genre forms. Lu Xun also has many works such as novels, prose, and essays. The works of the two writers have many similarities in terms of ideological connotation, language features, and writing techniques. In particular, the novels are characterized by witty writing, ingenious ideas, and realism, which profoundly reproduce the darkness of the real society at that time and have great practical significance. The author intends to take the novels of the two writers as an example to compare the author's creative methods, expression techniques and the literary views of the two writers.

II. NATSUME SOSEKI AND LU XUN

Natsume Soseki (1867-1916) was born in a famous family in Edo, Japan. He was ranked as the youngest man in his family. His family was gradually declining before he was born, and his parents were 50 years old when Natsume Soseki was born. His parents were indifferent to this nephew. When Natsume Soseki was 2 years old, he was transferred to the Yanyuan family by his parents. After the adoptive parents' family was not guilty, Natsume Soseki returned to

his biological parents at the age of 10. However, the mother's early death and long-standing inconvenience between father and brother has forced him to learn to face life when he was very young. The childhood experience made Natsume Soseki begin to think independently and not easily believe in and cater to anyone and things. These experiences have greatly influenced his future literary creation. Natsume Soseki studied Sinology at an early age. At the age of 23, he entered the Imperial University of Tokyo to study English. After graduation, he became an English teacher. In 1900, he was recommended by the Ministry of Education to study in the UK for two years. After returning to Japan, he continued to teach in colleges and universities. During this period, Natsume Soseki accepted the education and edification of the multiculturalism of the East and the West, and deeply understood the differences between the Eastern and Western society and culture. This gave birth to profound critical color in his literary creation. After returning to Japan in 1903, Natsume Soseki published a serial short story "I am a Cat" in the "Du Juan" magazine, which was highly praised. As a starting point, he created and published classic works such as "The Brothers", "Gubijins" and "The Story of Three Loves". He is known as the "national writers" of Japan.

Lu Xun (1881-1936) is a famous Chinese writer and thinker and the founder of modern Chinese literature. His representative works include "The True Story of Ah Q" and "The Madman's Diary", which is known as "the largest territory on the map of East Asian culture in the 20th century". Like Natsume Soseki, Lu Xun was also born in a scholar-gentry family. At the age of 12, his family had come down in the world. The hardships of life and the disputes between family and relatives made Lu Xun see the attitudes of the people very early, and realized that the world was cold. In 1902, he studied abroad in Japan for medical treatment, and later abandoned the medical study because of the "slide event." During his stay in Japan, Lu Xun read and studied Japanese modern literature, and selectively translated, evaluated and introduced it back to China. His late literary creation was deeply influenced by Natsume Soseki. Lu Xun praised the works of Natsume Soseki, saying that it is "excited by imagination and exquisite words". In the early years, "The Brothers" and "I am a Cat" published in the "cuckoo" of the witty magazine are brisk, free and witty.

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They are the mainstream of the new Edo art in the literary world. [1] The two people even rented the same residence in Nishikatamachi, Tokyo. In 1909, after returning to China, Lu Xun served as a university lecturer and government official. Later, he joined the "New Youth" to be a member of the editorial board. In 1918, he published the first vernacular short story "The Madman's Diary" in the history of modern Chinese literature. And then, many works such as "Scream", "Wandering", "Jieting Essays" and other novels and essays have been published. He is the leading figure in the 20th century Chinese New Culture Movement. He used humorous and extremely ironic words to inspire the public and had major impact on the development of Chinese social thought and culture after the May Fourth Movement.

III. STRONG CRITICAL REALISM

A. *The Practical Significance of Criticism*

Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun's novels have very strong critical color in terms of language, plot and expression of meaning, and they are unique in their respective national literary circles. "I am a cat" of Natsume Soseki seems to be the life of a cat in a normal teacher's family. In fact, it is a cat's perspective. It borrows the cat's mouth to satirize and criticize the Japanese bourgeoisie copying the Western capitalism entirely, sharply exposing the Japanese capitalist society's money worship and self-interest. "Brother" also criticized the corruption and vulgar phenomenon in the education industry with the perspective and experience of the protagonist. The "master" in Lu Xun's "Hometown" expressed the sad concept of the class in the feudal society, showing the numbness of the poor people at the bottom of the oppressed. This "master" will deeply separate "Run Tu" and "I", bringing "me" heavy repression and infinite sorrow, profoundly exposing and criticizing the old society that was still deeply influenced by feudal traditional thoughts before and after the Revolution of 1911. Humanity is ruthlessly distorted by cruel life, resulting in the numbness, indifference and estrangement between people.

B. *Critical Color*

Regarding the critical colors in Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun's works, the two writers were in the same age. In the Meiji era in which Natsume Soseki was located, Japanese capitalism began to sprout and develop rapidly, launching Japanese-Russian and Sino-Japanese wars. Japan also overthrows the Shogunate to establish a new government and implement the Meiji Restoration. Lu Xun was in the late Qing Dynasty. Outside, the country suffered long-term aggression by Japanese and Western powers. Inside, the feudal society was dead end. People lived in the darkness. Long-term multiple oppression made people more numb and indifferent. From the subjective view, Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun have similar childhood experiences. They were born in the famous family, and then, the family had come down in the world. All kinds of experiences let them see the warmth and coldness of the people very early. They start thinking independently since they were very young. They are good at thinking. And the thought is naturally more profound. At the

same time, they both have experience in studying abroad. Natsume Soseki witnessed the development of Japanese capitalism. Under the background of "civilization and enlightenment" and the Europeanization of social life during the Meiji Restoration period, Natsume Soseki accepted the arrangement of Ministry of Education to study in the UK for two years, and deeply understood the truth of Western capitalism. It is not as perfect as the Japanese reformers have promoted, which makes Natsume Soseki aware of the critical treatment, learning and introduction of capitalism and Western culture. Lu Xun's grandfather and father were Jinshi and Xiucan, respectively. It was a famous family in the late feudal period. Lu Xun's father, Zhou Boyi was more open-minded. Lu Xun began to contact with the new school since he was a child. For this reason, Lu Xun was sober and aware of various drawbacks of the feudal society. In 1902, Lu Xun went to Japan to study medicine in Sendai. Later, because of the "slide event", he realized that only by transforming the national character from the ideology can he truly save the nation from peril. He abandoned the medicine study to learn literature.

In the end, the two writers have a strong sense of responsibility and mission to the country and the nation. As Natsume Soseki said, he wanted to do his best job as a writer: "Standing in this world, I want to know the degree of people accepting the influences. As a member of society, I want to know the power to become the youth of the flesh and blood." Lu Xun also has the heroic ambition of "I safeguard the country with my blood". The two people have integrated what they have seen, learned, and known with their keen social insights and critical thinking. With the literary form of criticism, they spread the literary to the masses, allowing more people to wake up from fanaticism or numbness.

IV. "YUYU" THOUGHTS

A. *The Initial Creation and Development of "Yuyu" Thought*

"Yuyu" is a very important and most characteristic theoretical proposition in Natsume Soseki's literary works. In the preface to the novel "The cockscomb" written by Kyoshi Takahama, Natsume Soseki divides the novel into "Yuyu" and "Non-Yuyu". He believes that "the so-called Yuyu novel, as the name suggests, is a leisurely novel, a novel that avoids the 'special' situation, an ordinary novel. Borrowing a word that is popular recently, it is the novels that are touched and untouched. Tea-tasting and watering the flowers are Yuyu. Joking is Yuyu. The painting and carving is Yuyu. Fishing, singing songs, watching drama, having the summer, and spa treatments are also Yuyu. As long as the Japanese-Russian war is no longer going on, there are no more people like Baulkman in the world; there will be plenty of Yuyu everywhere. Therefore, it is also appropriate to write these novels with Yuyu thoughts. ... The novel without Yuyu thoughts refers to a highly nervous novel. In such novels, people don't have spare time to walk, bend, or sway. It is a novel without soothing elements or easy factors. [2] In this regard, he also cited two examples. A person goes out to buy things. He only looks at the pedestrians and scenery on the

road, and finally forgets to buy things; Natsume Soseki believes that the process on the road is more important than buying things. As a result, the scenery along the way, the mood of enjoying the scenery, and even the expression of the pedestrians on the road are "Yuyu". All the villagers in a fishing village ran to the beach, waiting for several fishing boats that could not stop on the shore because of the wind and waves. All the villagers have been looking at the depths of the ocean, no one talking, eating or drinking. This is "non-Yuyu". In the early stage of Natsume Soseki's literary creation, he highly praised the literary concept of "Yuyu". In the Natsume Soseki's first work "I am a Cat", "Yuyu" thought emerges. The whole work is in a relaxed, ironic, witty language. From the perspective of the people, it whipped the darkness of Japanese society at that time. In "The Three-Cornered World", Natsume Soseki compares the Eastern and Western cultures, and strongly appreciates the leisurely and relaxed peace of Tao Yuanming and Wang Wei's retreat from the world. At the same time, he writes: "It is true that, as a part of the world, people will not be in a non-human environment for a long time. Tao Yuanming couldn't stare at Nanshan Mountain for a year. Wang Wei was not willing to sleep in the bamboo forest without hanging it. So do I. "Yuyu" thought is expressed in a few words in this sentence. With comprehensive and meticulous observation, deep research, reflection, and detailed descriptions of daily life in the "human world", the writers will use humorous and ironic language to express the essence of things, expose and satirize the darkness of society. As a result, "Three-Cornered World" has become a symbolic work for Natsume Soseki's "Yuyu" thought. Since then, the Love Trilogy, "Sanshiro", "From now on" and "Gate" have also reflected the helplessness of Japanese ordinary intellectuals in real life with different details of daily life, and the road to awakening and growth that is opposite to the fate of life. It exposes the hypocrisy and darkness of Japanese society.

B. Lu Xun's Resonance and Perfection of the "Yuyu" Thought of Natsume Soseki

Lu Xun greatly resonated with Natsume Soseki's "Yuyu" thought. He pointed out, "with some gossip or jokes, you can add vitality and make readers more interested." He uses the frame of the book as a metaphor to explain "Yuyu". If the typesetting of the book is from the beginning of the page, the page will be dense without the gap. It will easily make people feel oppressed. If the typesetting is rich in the space, the reader will have their opinions. It will make people feel comfortable. This is "Yuyu". His novels are deeply influenced by the thought of "Yuyu". In "The True Story of Ah Q", "It is not just the idler; he finally is hit by the son. Ah Q was defeated in form, and he was caught with Huangbianzi. He was hit four or five times on the wall. The idler was satisfied with the victory. Ah Q stood for a moment and thought, 'I finally got beaten by my son. Now, the world is really not decent... so I am satisfied with the victory.'" The meticulous psychological description portrays the hero's self-deprecating and self-solving by relying on the "spiritual victory method" to obtain the ironic image of poor "self-esteem". In the vernacular short story "The Madman's Diary",

"I have not seen him for more than 30 years. I have seen it today, and my spirit is exceptionally refreshing." Then, in the past thirty years, all of them are faint. However, they must be very careful. Otherwise, why did the Zhao family's dog look at me?" With the detailed and meticulous psychological description, extreme irony and witty language, the darkness of Chinese society at the time was revealed, and the bottom people were numb and pedantic.

Lu Xun's "Yuyu" thought was deeply influenced by Natsume Soseki. However, he did not fully grasp it. Unlike the idealism of Natsume Soseki's "Yuyu" view, Lu Xun believed that "Yuyu" literature was determined by objective material conditions. He said in the speech of "literature in the revolutionary era", there must be no literary works in the time of poverty. When I was in Beijing, I was able to borrow money everywhere, writing no words. When I was paid, I sat down to make a fuss. The carter must put the car down, they can make a fuss. The creation of literature is like planting willow trees. "When the willows grow up, the shades are shaded. The farmer farms until noon, they can sit under the willow trees to eat and rest." [3] This materialistic "Yuyu" thought is the development and improvement of Natsume Soseki's "Yuyu" thought.

At the same time, many novels of Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun with the thought of "Yuyu" have been widely disseminated in their respective countries because of their humorous humor and close to the lives of the people. Their profound revolutionary ideas have been accepted by more people, becoming the pioneers of transforming nationality in the historical rapids of the two countries.

V. CONCLUSION

Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun are revolutionary writers and thinkers in the Asian literary world. Their novels are harmonious, and express the profound revealing and ruthless criticism of the social darkness of the two writers. For many readers at that time, it is the pointed light in the darkness. Mao Zedong once commented: "The direction of Lu Xun is the direction of the new culture of the Chinese nation." [4] The sense of social responsibility assumed by the two writers has had far-reaching effects on the progress of the social and cultural thoughts of their respective countries.

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