The Paradoxical Balance Between Aesthetic Self-regulation and Social Utility—Demonstration and Analysis of Laoshe’s Literature Education

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Abstract. Based on Laoshe as a case study of literary education problems, to explore of Lao she's literary thought, detailed in-depth digging out the literary thought of Laoshe presents aesthetic self-discipline and social utility paradox of balance. The change of the relationship between the two is the conscious choice of the social responsibility, the writer consciousness and the consciousness of the educator consciousness.

1. Introduction

Laoshe is well known as an excellent modern writer, and the academic circle has done a lot of research on Laoshe, which has made many scholars such as Wu Xiaomei, Shi Xingze, Zhang Guixing and so on. Among them, in the research of Laoshe's ideological theory, there are Shi Xingze's "Generation and Development of Laoshe Literary Thought" (1993), "Four Consciousness-Laoshe's Fifties and Sixties" (1996), "Laoshe Literary Thought's Generation and Development And Chinese Folk Popular Literature "(1996); Wu Xiaomei's "Forty-Four Lectures on Laoshe's Literary Theory "(2016)," On the Literary Theory of Laoshe"(2016); Meng Guanglai's “A Preliminary Study on the Development of Laoshe's Thoughts in the 1920s—on One of the Ways of the Development of Laoshe's Thoughts” (1982), Zhao Peiyu's “A Study on the Early Literary Thoughts of Laoshe” (2016), and other works and papers. In terms of the research on Laoshe and Chinese education, a brief introduction is made based on the literature of Laoshe and the teaching career of Laoshe, such as “The Literature Achievement and Chinese Education Practice of Laoshe by Jiang Xiquan” (2002). Or from the perspective of Laoshe’s teaching experience, talk about the impact on Laoshe’s works, such as Liu Jiaojiao’s “On the Impact of Teacher Education on Laoshe” (2013), Liang Yao's "Laoshe's Teaching Experience and His Novel Creation in the 1920s and 1930s" (2014); Or from the language style embodied in the literary works of Laoshe and the efforts of Laoshe in the standardization of literary language, from the level of Chinese language teaching, such as Zhang Weiwei’s "Laoshe and Chinese Education" (2006); Or start from Laoshe's literary works alone to talk about the educational thoughts of Laoshe, such as Cui Mingfeng's “On the Educational Thoughts in Laoshe's Novels” (1988), or start from the educational thoughts to discuss social issues, such as Liu Jiaojiao's “On the Reflection and Construction of Laoshe's Educational Novels on the National Character” (2014).

The concept of “literature education” has been interpreted differently by different scholars in the academic world. The academic world’s more comprehensive view of the concept of “literature education” is that “literature education” includes the following two meanings. First, the broad sense of "literature education" can be understood in a broad sense. Then, all kinds of literature activities, such as stage performance, public literature lectures, library reading guidance, circulation of literature publications, media literature programs, poetry recitation, etc., can be included in the scope of literature education as long as they are closely related to literature" [1]; Second, literature education in the school language class in a narrow sense, "refers to the literature courses that are formally incorporated into the educational system in full-time small and medium schools, and should also include adult education,
network education, television education and other amateur literature courses”. [1] This article focuses on Laoshe's idea of literature education, which is closer to the latter, that is, closer to extensive text reading. The place is not limited to language classrooms. As long as it has an impact on the trainees, it can be called literature education.

2. Aesthetic Self-Regulation: The Focus of Laoshe's Early Literature and Art

Looking at the literary thoughts of Laoshe's whole life, we find that the literary consciousness of Laoshe fluctuates. It is important to note that, probably around 1938, Laoshe's literary ideas can be divided into two periods. For the sake of convenience, this paper regards the literary thoughts of Laoshe in the 30's as the early thoughts of Laoshe, and the late thoughts continue from the 40's to the 50's.

Laoshe's literary thought in the 1930s tried to eliminate absurdity, expounded the artistic quality of literature, and regarded beauty as the soul. Since then, with the change of the historical background, Laoshe no longer tried to prove the primary position of literature aesthetics like this period. In the introduction to Literature handout written by Cheeloo University, he said bluntly: "the goal of morality is good, and the end of literature and art is beauty; how can literature marry morality to produce beautiful children?" [2] Behind this sentence is also included: "morality must obey beauty, beauty does not obey moral" [2], “No matter what the propaganda is good or bad, it always makes literature and art more or less damaged”[2], “The success of a literary work depends on whether it has artistic value or not, and its implication in content is secondary”[2], to "throw away this ruler (morality), let us run into the paradise of literature, free to breathe the air with flowers!" [2] The implication is that ignoring the independence and non-instrumental nature of literature, violating the laws and values of literary creation, and rashly attaching literature to morals are damage and insult to literature. Literature, as an independent art form, should not be a vassal at anytime and anywhere. It is not a tool. It can only be developed with respect to the law of art. The literary works written are the real works. And beauty is the only standard to evaluate and measure literature. In Laoshe's literary treatise, the beauty of literature refers to artistic expression. Whether it is the appreciation of literature, or the creation of literature, it is the primary emotion and art form.

Laoshe believes that emotion is one of the basic characteristics of literature. "We can imagine a man without emotion, but not a literature without emotion; Literature without emotion is literature without expression, and that is literature's damned day." [3] The work has no emotion. It is simply a narrative of facts. The quality of the work depends on the feelings of the work. Whether the writer gives emotion to the work, and whether the reader can perceive the emotion. Although good works must contain thoughts and philosophy in literary works as rational existence, if "there are profound thoughts but not artistic expression, it cannot be regarded as composition works." [3] Once the emotion is not fully expressed in literary works, it will make the works become superficial and reduce the social and artistic value. He once criticized the realistic school for advocating for turning objective description into subjective, and exaggerated emotions were incorporated into literary works, which could not only touch the readers, but also not call it literature. Obviously, Laoshe strongly emphasizes artistic expression.

This emphasis is very important. In the 1930s, it was a period of active left-wing literary activities. There was a fierce critical struggle between the "left League" and the "free man" and the "third man". The radical young members of the "leftist League" proposed to use literature "as a revolutionary tool of the organization" [4]. This wave of creation and criticism that ignored the essence of literature and art and turns to slogans was obviously a kind of harm to literature. Although Laoshe was not in the same camp as Hu Qiujuan and Su Wen, this literary "instrumentalism" of utilitarian rather than artistic thought was contrary to Laoshe's literary thought. From Laoshe's point of view, the essence of literature lies in its artistry, image, and emotion. Literary creation is self-expression. The life focus of the work is
to satisfy the individual, which is the expression of personality. Personal feelings are put into writing, and they are constantly deepened. When they are beautiful, they need to be beautiful, and strive to reach the peak. It is valuable for readers to see literature and discuss literature from the point of art. "Whether it's a literary revolution or a revolutionary literature, there can be no art without this heart (artistic heart)." [2] Therefore, at that time, Laoshe tried to emphasize literature aesthetics as a refutation of literature "instrumentalism".

However, through the discussion of Laoshe in this period, it can be found that Laoshe only opposes the relationship between beauty and goodness, literature and morality, art law and social utility. He does not deny the social utility of literature, but stresses the self-discipline of literary aesthetics. Laoshe believes that literature is not a slogan for propaganda, nor is it a copy of life's state of affairs, but a pastime. The essence of literature is that by observing life, experiencing life, and expressing life and soul through works of art. "Let's see the society, the people, how many of your countrymen are killed by guns in a day, and what tricks corrupt officials can play there. Look at life, appreciate life, then your works will have life!" [2] The life of literature still needs to be maintained on the concern of social life. In Laoshe's mind, the "life" of literature is relative to the "propaganda", literature is the expression of personality, but personality is not the individual self, but represents millions of people, literature is still the voice of The Times, it should express the universal content of life, to play a guiding role in life. Laoshe's literature includes a social utility, and this social utility is not a criterion for judging the pros and cons of literature. And between aesthetics and social utility, he chose to focus on aesthetics, but did not abandon the social utility of literature.

3. Social Utility: The Leading Role of Literature and Art in the Later Period of Laoshe

After entering the 1940s, with the beginning of the Anti Japanese War, Laoshe put the identity of national first and the identity of writer second. In the background of the war, the deep sense of civilians and the sense of oppression caused Laoshe to change his mind. He no longer continued his literary ideas, but began to move towards literary ideas with a strong sense of social utility. Unlike earlier periods, he began to affirm literature as a propagandistic literary proposition. "In the nature of literature and art, popular literature and art really fulfill the responsibility of propaganda and teaching" [5], "All literary works should promote something"[5]. The performance of literature is no longer the field of aesthetics, and art is no longer a single standard to judge the merits of literary works. Laoshe began to introduce social utility into the value standard, and aesthetic art and utilitarianism were combined to treat literature. Before the war, the value of literature lies in its artistry. As long as it conforms to the artistic standards, its connotation is not particularly important. They are secondary to social effects and the influence of the times. They cannot be compared with art and go hand in hand. However, by the 1940s, Laoshe's sense of social and social responsibility changed his view of literature. What to write and how to write it were no longer the most important questions, he said, "as long as it served the purpose of the war of resistance." [6] "Literature and art must seize the mainstream of the times, and it must be integrated with the tasks of society. At any time, the mainstream literature and art is always tightly integrated with the tasks of society."[7] The purpose of literary creation has become to educate the public, and the value of literature depends on its actual effect. One is that the writer who pursues art decides to sacrifice his own literature and art to meet the requirements of the times, and to compromise and accept social utility, which is the most obvious change of the literary and art thought of Laoshe in wartime. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Laoshe, under the influence of social and political enthusiasm, responded positively to “The Speech at the Forum on Literature and Art in yan 'an”. This established a theoretical system centered on the service of workers, peasants and soldiers and the service of socialist politics. The symbolic theory system completes the literary theories such as "Popular Literary and Artistic Creation Issues", "How to Write Popular Literature and Art", "How Do I Learn Language", "Several Issues About Creation" and other issues published by Laoshe. In these
articles, he constantly negates the literary thoughts of the past and talks about how to build socialist literature and art. He made it clear that literature and art should be written for the purpose of propagating socialist political tasks, and stressed that new people and new things should be praised in a timely manner, because these are the "first tasks" of literature and art, which should be "extolled desperately" and "never forgotten at any moment" [8].

But this change does not mean that aesthetic art has been abandoned. However, in terms of the relationship between aesthetic self-regulation and social utility, Laoshe began to choose the literary thoughts dominated by social utility from the 1940s. Because after 1941, Laoshe struggled with her living habits, and her hidden sense of individuality began to rise again. In the game of aesthetics and utilitarian consciousness, Laoshe began to reflect on the achievements of the three years of the Anti-Japanese War. Therefore, although Laoshe did not leave the main theme of the Anti-Japanese War, he also began to use the Anti-Japanese War to show his thinking on history, culture and national spirit. This is not to say that it is a return to the early literary thoughts, and this kind of thinking continued to the 1960s. With a certain degree of return, Laoshe also began to propose that literature should pay attention to artistic expression while serving the society. But at this time Laoshe did not say that emotion is important, but that speech is important. He said that words are the key to people's "heart lock", and that words can "tell the most beautiful, the most true and the most beautiful things in the world to those who look at them quickly". [9] In fact, the words at this time say: words can open people's hearts. How to open the hearts of people, emotional resonance! If emotion is not important, why use good language, and why care about the language of literature? Although Laoshe had to cover up to emphasize that "speech is a tool of literature and art". [9] Laoshe tells readers through this: I still advocate social utility! However, a careful reading of the contradictory words of Laoshe shows that there is no abandonment of the aesthetic self-regulation of literature in Laoshe's literary thoughts. Especially in the short period of three years after the "Double Hundred" policy was proposed, Laoshe wrote articles such as "Talking Satire", "Freedom and the Writer", "Talking Tragedy", "Three Words and Two Languages", and repeatedly emphasized that literary creation must respect art The law must be faithful to one's own heart, and the creative personality of the writer must be valued. To write the characters, lives and themes you like, and to know that this pursuit of individuality is actually a literary creation that follows your own emotions? This kind of "return" to emotion is the most real pursuit in Laoshe's heart.

The characteristics of Laoshe's literary thoughts in the later period are the dominant manifestation of social utility, while aesthetic self-regulation is hidden. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Laoshe's literary thoughts went through several iterations during the reconciliation between social environment and inner heart, but they finally showed that "motivation should be maintained, and the rules of creation should be taken into consideration. The two should be balanced and combined." [10] However, this contradiction also includes Laoshe's balance of aesthetic self-regulation and social utility. This division is a conscious differentiation of a writer based on the dual needs of society and self-development.

4. The Balance of Paradox: the Complete Experience of Emotion and Will

Walking into the world of Laoshe's literary awareness, you can see that Laoshe has been making important decisions in aesthetic self-regulation and social utility all his life. On the surface, aesthetic self-regulation and social utility are contradictory. When looking at the early literary theory of Laoshe alone, especially “Introduction to Literature Handout” (and this handout was used as the handout for students of Cheeloo University at that time), it is easy to give the illusion that what Laoshe instilled into students in class is: Appreciation and creation of literature is a matter of aesthetics, and the quality of literature depends on its beauty. A work without emotion is a failure. Laoshe overemphasized that literature should express its own feelings, attach importance to the aesthetic effect of literature, and
attach importance to art for self-expression, while ignoring Laoshe's explanation of "literature is life"1. Although the pursuit of literature is artistic, it is also closely connected with society. Once connected with society, literature can no longer be a personal slang term, but a social influence. It implies Laoshe's sense of social responsibility. It's just that this sense of social responsibility gives way to the ideology of the writer. Laoshe is not willing to serve the society for the sake of publicity effect. It is easy to simplify the characters into a simple microphone, which makes the characters lose the artistic law and say what they should not say. He emphasized that literature is the art of language, and tirelessly emphasized the beauty of refined language, striving for the unity of characters and language. This is obviously contrary to the social utility, the neglect of literary characteristics and the neglect of life advocated by Laoshe in the early period of the leftist revolutionary literature. However, with the change of the social background, the War of Resistance made Laoshe's inner sense of social responsibility rise, and then "abandoned" the original literary concept and chose the opposite literary concept-literature needs to serve reality. After the Anti Japanese War and even after the founding of the People's Republic of China, a large number of literary theories of Laoshe clearly show the pursuit of social utility of literary works. This results in the obvious difference between the early aesthetic self-regulation and the later social utility of Laoshe.

5. Conclusion

In a turbulent age, Laoshe can still bear a child's heart, whether he is out of his sense of social responsibility, or the consciousness of a writer, or the consciousness of a former educator, he is based on his own literary creation. The love and creative experience provided the young students at the time with their own views and help. From Laoshe's literary theories, especially those related to youth, we sorted out the characteristics of aesthetic self-regulation and paradoxical balance of social utility, and discussed the significance of his thoughts to the current literature education. Contemporary literature education failed to really play its role, and literature became a tool for test scoring. However, the literary thoughts left behind by Laoshe shine brightly, still guiding contemporary literature education and helping contemporary literature to get out of the predicament. His thought of literal education tells us that literature can not only teach people to observe society and understand life, but also teach people to feel emotion and soul, and make personality develop in a balanced way in the process of literal education. The contradiction between the aesthetics of contemporary literature education and social utility is not irreconcilable. The two can be reconciled, but only more efforts must be made by the literature education.

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