

CONCEPT OF 'RÉN' IN THE PROSE OF ZHOU ZUOREN

Dr. Nishant Kumar

Dr. Nishant Kumar, Assistant Professor, Centre for Chinese Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar.

sirfnishant@gmail.com

Abstract

Zhou Zuoren is a well-known prose writer and a literary critic in the history of modern Chinese literature. He has a rich collection of his original writings and also translated a considerable number of works from other foreign languages as well. His literary creation is actually the embodiment of his literary theory. This paper aims to explore the rich connotation and unique nature of Zhou Zuoren's literary thoughts. The paper tries to explore and analyse the concept of 'rén' [人, which means 'human being'] as depicted in the prose of Zhou Zuoren. The research is based on the literature review, which focuses on the ideological origin of Zhou Zuoren's literary views, and the study of Zhou Zuoren's literary thoughts. The various aspects of literary views, literary functionalism and literary history are the focus of Zhou Zuoren's literary thoughts. Findings in the present research describes that Zhou Zuoren's spiritual value and his orientation towards 'humanistic literature' is an integral aspect of his literary views and his concept of *rén*.

Key words: Concept of *rén*, Zhou Zuoren's prose, humanistic literature, spiritual value

1. Introduction

Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967), is a native of Shaoxing, Zhejiang. He is a famous modern essayist, literary theorist, poet, translator, thinker, pioneer of folklore, and an outstanding representative of the New Culture Movement. It is believed that the formation of Zhou Zuoren's literary thought is not a simple horizontal transplantation, but a special crystallization of thoughts that is formed after he integrated the influence of various Chinese and Western thoughts according to his own understanding, which is a mixture of many modern factors and traditional cultural genes. It takes natural human nature as the theoretical basis, and humanism and individualism as two important theoretical pillars. Zhou Zuoren's advocacy of 'human literature' comes from Western humanistic thought, while the advocacy of 'individual literature' has a close internal logical connection with individualism. Throughout his life, Zhou Zuoren's various ideas about literature are based on these two philosophies.

Starting with the essence and function of literature, it is believed that Zhou Zuoren's thoughts on literature have changed over the course of time. Although in terms of its status in literary history or its social impact, The Origin and Development of New Chinese Literature cannot be compared with 'Humanist Literature'. Humanist Literature conforms to the trend of enlightenment and modernity, marking the modern dimension of Chinese literary thought, especially establishing the humanistic spiritual core of modern Chinese literature.

2. Zhou Zuoren's Concept of 'rén'

Zhou Zuoren's thoughts are mainly reflected in his views on 'rén' (human life). In his concept of human existence, the view of life and death, the view of enjoyment, the view of women, and the view of reincarnation are its core themes. The concept of impermanence of life and enjoying life in time comes from biological evolution and natural human nature theory. The view of women reflects the influence of humanism and cultural anthropology on him. The view of reincarnation is mainly influenced by Buddhism and Christianity. The concept of 'rén' is reflected in his essays, forming a literary taste of indifference, elegance, fate, and bitterness, and is also reflected in the humanism and aesthetic non-utilitarianism in literary theory.

Some people say that Zhou Zuoren was born in the wrong era. If he was born in the contemporary era of economic prosperity and social stability, he would not have to endure the test of morality. His plain and peaceful style and profound knowledge would make him a master in the literary world, making him stand out from the crowd. Disgrace and fame are determined by both the times and the individual. Zhou Zuoren once had very lofty social ideals, a high appreciation of culture and literature, and a very elegant taste for life, all of which can be seen in his articles, and all of which are inseparable from his concept of 'rén'. From 1904, when he began to first publish his articles to 1966, the year before his death, he wrote thousands of articles in total. These articles all reflect his thinking about people. He laid the ideological foundation for modern literature with the literary concept of 'human literature'. At the same time, his degeneration from an initial humanitarian to a thorough individualist is also closely related to his concept of 'rén'. It can be said that concept of 'rén' has been the complex literary puzzle that Zhou Zuoren could not solve throughout his life, and it is also the core of his contradictory life.

2.1 The connotation of Zhou Zuoren's view of humanism

Zhou Zuoren's view of humanism is first of all his view of life and death. Zhou Zuoren's view of life and death is a process full of contradictions and changes. In the early stage, his view of life and death was positive, he was passionate to sacrifice his life for justice. In 1904, he published an article *Speaking of Death and Life* in "Women's World", in which he pointed out, when a century is over, the question of life and death would be trivial. Although he lamented the impermanence of life, he believed that as long as one is dedicated himself to the nation, he would die a worthy death.

Since the beginning, Zhou Zuoren's views of life and death were contradictory. During his time in Japan, he formed the initial idea of establishing 'rén'. He believed that the first priority in life is to survive. During this period, Zhou Zuoren witnessed the failure of the Great Revolution and felt at a loss in the face of the dark reality. In the article *Human Literature*, he believed that humans evolved from animals, and that humans have physical desires and demands. The ideal life for humans includes two aspects. The first is material life. Zhou Zuoren's outlook on life further regressed, and he began to return to tradition in terms of thoughts and interests. He admired the life interests of scholars and officials, and tried to enjoy a little beauty and harmony in the imperfect world. The second is to use methods to relieve boredom, such as smoking opium, taking concubines, gambling, staying in hot springs, etc., which are all ways to relieve boredom, but some of them require a lot of money, and some require a lot of effort, which poor people do not have the energy and money to do it.

After thinking hard, he finally came up with a method, which was reading behind closed doors.

Zhou Zuoren admired Jin Shengtan. Jin Shengtan advocated enjoying real life and often satirized Confucian scholars who strictly abided by etiquette (Sieber, 2000, p57). Zhou Zuoren also repeatedly praised Jin Shengtan's aesthetic life attitude. It is worth noting that Zhou Zuoren's hedonistic outlook is by no means a pursuit of material desires. On the contrary, he despises material life and focuses on spiritual enjoyment. This hedonistic outlook has a strong scholar-official atmosphere. His views on women reflect the progressive side of Zhou Zuoren's ideas. This progressiveness is reflected in his humanitarianism. As an important ideological enlightenmentist during the "May Fourth" period, Zhou Zuoren had a profound understanding of women's issues. In 1918, Zhou Zuoren published "Human Literature", He pointed out that to study people, we must study women, and to liberate people, we must liberate women. His views on women in society have various aspects:

2.2 Criticising the hypocritic approach on chastity

In 1918, Zhou Zuoren translated the "Chastity Theory" by Japanese Yosano Akiko and published it in "New Youth" magazine. He declared that "lack of love" was the main feature of traditional marriage and was immoral. At the end of the same year, Zhou Zuoren advocated love marriage for men and women in *Human Literature*. He scientifically analysed that chastity, from the perspective of biological evolution, is the remnant of animal nature, which hinders the healthy development of life; from the perspective of time and space, the "sati" of ancient India, that is, the widow was cremated with her husband's body, and the "chastity" of Chinese women, these so-called national essence of the East, are the evil consequences of unnatural institutional habits. Criticizing chastity and virginity is the core of Zhou Zuoren's articles against old morality and old ethics, and it is also his consistent attitude. After the climax of the May Fourth Movement, although he was depressed and confused, he still hated the preaching of chastity. At that time, Zhou Zuoren criticized the chastity theory while vigorously praising Ibsen's plays. The main purpose of Ibsen's plays is to promote the free love of young men and women and oppose arranged marriages. He advocated that there is no such thing as chastity and virginity in the "marriage of love" between men and women.

2.3 Criticising concubines and prostitution

Zhou Zuoren hated men's prostitution. In his article *The Kinu River Incident*, he wrote about prostitution (which is also a kind of rape) is an act against nature, and in his view it is lower than animals, making people engage in prostitution to make a living, it is something that even animals wouldn't do, so it is lower than animals. Although he was among the scholars, he did not have the bad habit of taking concubines and visiting prostitutes. He believed that Chinese men wanted their wives to be chaste and chaste, but they themselves openly visited prostitutes and took concubines, how hypocritical they were. Zhou Zuoren narrated such a meaningful story. Once when the capital was pacified, a wandering warrior raped a woman, but told her not to be raped by others. Zhou was especially hurt by these kind of hypocrisy.

2.4 Opposing the foot binding tradition for women

Zhou Zuoren's aesthetic view of "shame of foot binding" was formed by the impact of Western ideas and his mother. The "May Fourth" New Culture Movement advocated humanity. Women are human beings, so of course they should oppose physical destruction. When he studied in Japan, he saw the natural feet of Japanese women and their swift walking, which aroused infinite emotion, he found that it is a very healthy and beautiful thing. His mother also bound her feet, but when the natural foot movement arose in the late Qing Dynasty, she was the first to unbind her feet despite the attacks of the old and young. Therefore, when Zhou Zuoren saw women with bound feet staggering on the street, or women struggling to move their bound feet to escape, he always showed deep sympathy and expressed extreme indignation against foot binding.

2.5 Value of Women's life

On the value of women's life, in "On the inappropriateness of using the word flower as a synonym for women", he said: "In the 20th century, the feelings of willows on the street and swords in dreams will be replaced by the taste of bullet rain and gun forests and the taste of black ice in the land of Hu. Whether it is Mercer, Manita, or Mrs. Roland, it is not the job of others. Therefore, women in the 20th century do not value beauty, but chivalry; do not worry about roughness, but worry about being weak and frivolous." He advocated that women should have the same rights as men to make achievements and establish their own careers.

3. Miscellaneous Studies and Zhou Zuoren's concept of 'rén'

Zhou Zuoren's views on life and death and enjoyment were most influenced by Ellis. In *The Psychology of Individual Differences*, Ellis (1930, p247) described the will to live as the core fact of human life activities. It is the basis of all human life activities and life, and the ultimate goal of human life activities and life provides a physiological basis for the will to live. He further explained based on physiology that the will to live is composed of a group of opposing factors - inhibition and development or abstinence and indulgence (Ellis, 1917, p354). These two factors are naturally present in the life of organisms, and their ultimate goal is to maximize the realization of the will to live. The realization of this will to live depends on the harmony and balance of the two factors of inhibition and development. For living things in nature, the will to survive can be achieved naturally through instinct, and these factors will be naturally reconciled. However, for humans, the realization of their will to survive must be achieved through their conscious and active use of various means, using their own activity ability to impose on life and life activities themselves, and reconciling various factors to maximize the realization of their will to survive.

In Ellis's (1917) view, this active reconciliation behavior of humans is an artistic behavior, because art refers to the sum of all human positive abilities. Ellis (1917, p302) believes that the origin of human moral activities is the artistic behavior of humans actively reconciling the two factors of suppression and development. He also calls this way of moral establishment the proper path of moral development, that is, "the traditional path created by instinct." It is the result of the art of life. He was amazed by the instincts of animals. He concluded that the instincts evolved from animals should be fully respected and all external suppression of human animal instincts should be opposed. Zhou Zuoren's view on women was influenced by humanitarian thought. Zhou Zuoren's humanitarianism, influenced by the

theory of evolution and the theory of natural human nature, tended to affirm the expression of human natural desires and the acquisition of the right to love and be loved. At the same time, he accepted the most fundamental concept of sexual morality from Ellis's *Studies in Psychology of Sex* and believed that normal human sexual desires should be satisfied (1917, p121). He believed that morality often changes with time and place and that all ancient etiquette and bestiality that hindered the upward development of human nature should be excluded and corrected.

Conclusion

Zhou Zuoren's literary thoughts and concept of human being were deeply influenced by Buddhism, Christianity and traditional Chinese culture. His contribution to modern Chinese novels is mainly focused on theoretical construction: advocating realistic novels and promoting the birth of new concepts in novels; translating Western novels to seek new ways for the development of modern novels in China, interpreting and explaining modern writings with the latest theories; emphasizing local colours and encouraging works that go deep into the folks to write about ordinary people and ordinary life. He advocated that criticism is also a kind of creation, and he not only borrowed the essence of impressionist criticism but also integrated his personal understanding of literary criticism, thus forming his own unique critical style. His specific criticism may be somewhat one-sided, but his series of literary thoughts have indelible value and far-reaching influence, and are precious heritage that must be inherited and carried forward.

While he had a broad understanding of modern European culture and tried to master various bourgeois ideological weapons, he viewed this religious culture from the perspective of a "literary man". In his early years, Zhou Zuoren came into contact with the Bible when he was studying in Nanjing, the influence of Christianity also formed his ideological characteristics of integrating the two cultural traditions. He believed that establishing a country starts with establishing people, and establishing people requires the full development of human nature, and literature and art can change temperament and transform society. One piece of writing can influence the entire world. Zhou Zuoren did not have a persistent religious belief. He did not recognize the existence of God and personal gods, but he placed high hopes on Christianity in the reality of over-promoting it. In terms of reforming people's thoughts, the idea of enlightenment through scientific thought gradually seem to be faded, and replaced by increasing belief in Christianity.

References

- Chén Zǐshàn, Zhāng Tiěróng. (1995). Zhōuzuo rén jí wàiwén. Hǎikǒu: Hǎinán guójì xīnwén chūbǎn zhōngxīn, 1995. [陈子善, 张铁荣. 周作人集外文. 海口: 海南国际新闻出版中心, 1995.]
- Ellis, H. (1917). *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Vol. VI, Sex in Relation to Society, F.A. Davis Company, Philadelphia.
- Fù Rǔchéng. (2000). Tán zhōuzuo rén de lúnhuái guān. Hénán diànshì dàxué xuébào, 2000(4). [傅汝成. 谈周作人的轮回观. 河南电视大学学报, 2000 (4) .]

- Lǐshǔháo. (2005). Zhōuzuo rén; guānniàn; zhǔtí; qùwèi zhōng tú fēnlèi hào:H210 wénxiàn biāozhì mǎ:A wénzhāng biānhào:1001-4403(2005)06-0068-05 2005 Nián 11 yuè dì 6 qī sūzhōu dàxué xuébào (zhéxué shèhuì kēxué bǎn) [李曙豪. (2005). 周作人; 观念; 人道主义; 趣味 中图分类号: H210 文献标识码: A 文章编号: 1001-4403(2005)06-0068-05 2005 年 11 月 第 6 期 苏州大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) Academic Journal of Suzhou University (Philosophy and Social Science) Nov.2005 No.6 收稿日期: 2005-03-15]
- Luó Jiālún. (1919). Shénme shì wénxué. Xīncháo,1919, dì 1 juǎn (2). 罗家伦. 什么是文学. 新潮, 1919, 第 1 卷 (2) .]]
- Robinson, Paul A. (1973). “Havelock Ellis and Modern Sexual Theory.” *Salmagundi*, no. 21, 1973, pp. 27–62. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40547346>.
- Sieber, P. (2000). Religion and Canon Formation: Buddhism, Vernacular Literature, and the Case of Jin Shengtan (1608-1661). *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 28(1), 51–68. <https://doi.org/10.1179/073776900805306649>
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (1908). “lùnwénzhāng yìyì jì shǐmìng yīn jí zhōngguó jìn shí lùn wén zhī shī” zài “hénán”. [周作人《论文章意义暨使命因及中国近时论文之失》载《河南》, 1908 年 5 月 6 日.]
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (1921). “Shèng shū yǔ zhōngguó wénxué”, zài “xiǎoshuō yuè bào”, dì 12 juǎn 1 hào. [《圣书与中国文学》, 载《小说月报》1921 年 1 月, 第 12 卷 1 号.]
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (1923). Wánjù. Chénbào fù yùjiàn,1923-03-29. [周作人. 玩具. 晨报副镌, 1923-03-29.]
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (1925). “. Tuóluó” xù. Yǔ sī,1925-06-22. 周作人. 玩具. 晨报副镌, 1923-03-29. [周作人《. 陀螺》序. 语丝, 1925-06-22.]
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (1926). “Wénrén zhī juān jì guān”. Zài “yǔ sī”1926 nián 7 yuè 5 rì, dì 86 qī. [《文人之娼妓观》. 载《语丝》1926 年 7 月 5 日, 第 86 期.]
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (1963). “(Cǎoxié jiǎo)(yīng yì zhōngguó duǎnpiān xiǎoshuō jí) xiǎo yǐn”. Zài “lǚxùn quánjí” dì 6 juǎn. Rénmín wénxué chūbǎn shè 1963 niánbǎn, dì 34 yè. [《(草鞋脚)(英译中国短篇小说集) 小引》. 载《鲁迅全集》第 6 卷. 人民文学出版社 1963 年版, 第 34 页.]
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (1988). *Wǒ de fùgǔ jīngyàn*. Zài “zìjǐ de yuándì”, “yǔtiān de shū”, rénmin wénxué chūbǎn shè 1988 niánbǎn, lìng jiàn “shèng shū yǔ zhōngguó wénxué”, “wénxué yǔ zōngjiào”. [《我的复古经验》. 载《自己的园地》, 《雨天的书》, 人民文学出版社 1988 年版, 另见《圣书与中国文学》、《文学与宗教》]
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (1989). [Yīng] kě'ài lǐ sī. Shēngmìng zhī wǔ. Xúzhōngjué děng yì. Běijīng: Sānlián shūdiàn. [(英) 葛理斯. 生命之舞. 徐钟珏等译. 北京: 三联书店, 1989.]
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (1997). Zhōngguó xīn wénxué de yuánliú. Hǎikǒu: Hǎinán chūbǎn shè,1997. [周作人. 中国新文学的源流. 海口: 海南出版社, 1997.]
- Zhōu, Zuòrén. (2002). Zhōuzuo rén jīngdiǎn zuòpǐn xuǎn. Běijīng: Dāngdài shìjiè chūbǎn shè. [周作人. 周作人经典作品选. 北京: 当代世界出版社, 2002.]