

# Literature in the Context of History

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## Abstract:

My research aims to discuss whether the context of The Times corresponds to the purpose and content that influence literary works. Humanists and historians focus on literature at a particular time, even when it seems to have little to do with historical context or human society. Therefore, the correlation and logic between literature and history or humanity seem to become more important. It is precisely because of the long history of literary works that the witness to history is more special. Therefore, I want to explore whether the economic, political, religious and cultural studies in the context of The Times can be reflected in literary works. It will provide insights into the social value of literary works and their literary value, as well as perspectives for advancing literature analysis.

**Keywords:** Literary works, times, economy, politics and culture, history, spirit of The Times and social trends

## 1. Introduction

### 1) *Research background:*

The relationship between literature and history has always been a hot topic in academic circles. Literature is often regarded as a mirror image of history, not only recording past events but also reflecting the social structure, cultural characteristics, and people's spiritual outlook of a particular era. From ancient epics to modern novels, history is always an important source of literary creation.

### 2) *Importance of research:*

An in-depth study of historical representation in literature can help us better understand the human experience in different cultures and eras. The historical elements in literary works enrich our historical and cultural knowledge and inspire our thinking and understanding of the real world.

### 3) *Research questions and objectives:*

This paper explores the following questions: How is history represented in the works of different literary schools and periods? How does literature shape and transmit history? This study aims to reveal the interactive relationship between literature and history and analyse the expression and significance of historical elements in literary works.

### 4) *Paper structure:*

This article will begin by providing an overview of the interwoven relationship between literature and history and exploring how they influence and shape each other. Then, through literary works from different historical periods, it will analyse the embodiment of history in literary creation. Finally, it will discuss the characteristics of historical fiction and the key issues of historical interpretation and summarise the main findings of this study.

### 5) *Research methods:*

This study uses literature, text, and case analysis. The theoretical framework is constructed through extensive reading and analysis of relevant literature. Through the in-depth analysis of specific literary works, the expression techniques of historical elements are revealed. Case studies show how history is reflected in different literary works.

6) *Expected contributions:*

Hopefully, this paper can provide a new perspective and insight into studying literature and history, enriching our knowledge and understanding of historical elements in literary works. At the same time, it also provides reference and inspiration for literary creation and history education.

## 2. Research study and analysis

“For the pleasure of literature, we need its influence to correct our thoughts and attitudes. [1]” This is a sentence from the Chinese writer Yu Hua. I think the influence of literature not only stays on each micro individual [2] and reflects in a macro era [3]. So, I would like to explore this: what is the value of literature from the perspective of a historian?

History is a grand narrative woven by countless events and characters, and literary works, with their unique perspectives and expression techniques, become another window for us to understand history [4]. They not only record the glory and suffering of the past but also make history vivid through the re-creation of art, helping us understand the multidimensional aspects of history from the side. And that is what I meant to say in this article.

The main value of literature work is to try to bring people the pleasure of reading, appreciating, and social perception [5]. The basic connotation of literary works lies in this. Literary works, including novels, film and television, or poems, are well known mainly because of their high literary value and unique social value, such as the emergence of new ideas, beautiful writing, or dramatic plots. For example, Pushkin’s inimitable love for life and the hope and redemption he brought to the people who had experienced the ravages of the Russian Revolution revealed in “*If Life Deceived You* [6]” were the embodiment of the social and literary values that literary works brought to the world at that time. But this is not the only one. Imagine that when a later historian reads this short poem, he will not only think of the optimism of the poet’s words but will also know a more objective assessment of the Decembrist uprising during the Russian Revolution, that is, not only the good side of the road to the overthrow of the Tsar or the road to modernisation but through these folk literary works, the other aspects of these historical events, that is how the revolution had done to the general

public [7]. In this way, it may help historians to characterise a certain historical event more comprehensively. The emergence of some novels is to emerge history [8]. For example, “*Red Star Over China* [9]” presents Edgar Snow’s record in northwest China, describing and representing the revolutionaries at that time. The real value of this novel is the presentation of history. His appearance is not deliberately “filtered”. Thus preserving the truth of history, this is a relatively direct example of literature to history and a good demonstration of the value and significance of literature to history: it played an important role in promoting the understanding of China in Western society at that time and the understanding of future generations of historians during the Chinese revolutionary period.

All of the above shows how a literary work is connected to history research. Many books we’ve seen can be connected to the background of the era. They are lateral and objective expressions of history. This can give the researchers another breakthrough point during their work.

A literary work will have the language representing his style, the narrative style representing the literary school, and will also have the values representing The Times. To make the simplest analogy, *Li Bai (701-762)* and *Du Fu (712-770)* [10], two famous poets in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), had very different styles and narratives. One was a romantic poet representing freedom and elegance, and the other was a realistic poet with a strong national complex. Looking at the lifetimes of the two, one was born in the Tang Dynasty, while the other was in the Tang Dynasty, gradually declining after the An Shi Rebellion. Thus, it can be seen that the background of The Times has a close relationship with each other and literary works. It can be said that the ups and downs of the era create the emotional tone of literary works, and the elements in literary works reflect the changes of the era.

What can be defined as the elements by which history is judged? This involves the analysis of the conditions for the objective presentation of history. Since we all know nothing can be one hundred per cent absolute, not all literary works have the ability to reflect history; we should have a trade-off. Firstly, a literary work can reinterpret historical events or the era’s background through fictional storylines and characterisation. This way of reproducing history can help readers gain a deeper understanding of the context and impact of historical events while also providing a platform for writers to express their opinions and emotions. Reproduction of historical events can be considered as one of the elements that can be used to judge history. Writers can choose important historical events as the background of their works and show the authenticity of history by describing the process and influence of the events. For example, the novel “*Gone With the Wind* [11]”

shows the social changes and people's life experiences in the southern United States through the background of the Civil War. It is a direct way of representing the past. Secondly, the writer can reproduce a particular era's characteristics and spirit by describing the historical era's style, social system and cultural atmosphere. Through detailed description and emotional expression, the work allows readers to feel the atmosphere and challenges of the historical era. For example, the novel "*A Dream of Red Mansions* [12]" shows the style and humanistic spirit of a specific historical era by depicting various contradictions and absurdities in the feudal society of the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911) [13]. Thirdly, literary works can also be interpreted and evaluated by representing historical events to explore the meaning and inspiration behind historical events. Writers can present different points of view and positions through fictional stories and dialogues with characters, provoking readers to think and reflect on historical events. For example, the novel "*1984*" explores power, freedom, and individual consciousness by depicting a totalitarian society. It can easily bring people to a specific situation and guide them to consider more possibilities of one event.

For further analysis, we should have considered the significance of reading a literary work from the sight of a historian. First, let's go back to concern about why it is literary, not scientific. A very important feature of literary works is the expression of emotion. Readers can always easily resonate with the hero in the book on emotion and mentality because of the exquisite text and the writer's language art. Thus, this kind of work often shows the influence and background of historical events through characters and plots and triggers readers' emotional resonance and emotional investment. Through literary works, readers can more deeply feel the tragic, tragic or heroic historical events, to enhance the identification and experience of historical events. Moreover, literary works can give us multiple perspectives, which may give researchers different entry points due to the author's position. Literary works often show historical events' multifaceted and complex nature through fictional storylines and characters. Writers can present the diversity and contradictions of historical events through the perspectives and experiences of different characters to help readers understand the background and influence of historical events more comprehensively. And there is another advantage of understanding history through literature. Literary works often use dialogue, conflict and plot arrangement to provoke readers to think and reflect on historical events. Through the fates and choices of characters in their works, writers can stimulate readers' deep and dialectical thinking about historical events and help readers better understand the complexity and diversi-

ty of historical events. To sum up, the influence of literary works on history is multifaceted, including the guidance of ideology, cultural inheritance and value shaping, the arousal of social consciousness, the stimulation of aesthetic emotion and the inheritance of historical memory. Literary works are of great significance and value as the representation and inheritor of history. They can influence readers' cognition and attitude towards historical events, help inherit and carry forward historical and cultural heritage, promote the cultivation of social consciousness and aesthetic emotions, and realise the inheritance of history and the enlightenment of contemporary times.

Literature is a microcosm of history, reflecting the social landscape, embodying cultural characteristics, recording changing times, and metaphorically representing historical events [14].

The society's difference is an indispensable element of the era with its characteristics. What society brings to people is not reflected in history books written in a biographical style, so we need some side things to serve as evidence or an example to help us understand and recognise the real face of society. One of my favourite books, "*Ordinary World*", could be a good example of how the article's words reveal the landscape of society. The most successful place of this novel is that it excellently shows the complex social contradictions in real life, which is the best tradition of realism — the courage to face the social life and write the truth, not fake. It vividly depicts dozens of farmers and local cadres with different personalities, shows the rich and complex rural social ecology and various economic, political and cultural conflicts, and profoundly expresses the people's reluctance to follow the old path and deviate path and join the reform and opening to change their destiny in life pursuit. Writing during profound conflicts and reflecting complex social contradictions in the rich characters' personalities impresses the play. The most prominent is the love tragedy in the novel, which reveals the profound influence of thousands of years of feudal habits, parents' will, the concept of family, the obstacles of rich and poor status, the relationship between marriage and power interests, the entanglements of old and new times, cultural differences and the limitations of spiritual vision, the conflict, turning and changing of ideals in reality, and the numerous contradictions cause the tortuous character fate, which makes people feel mixed. And these are exactly the ills of Chinese society during the Cultural Revolution, the real problems that have not been recorded. We often say that when we read history, we can be wise, we can learn from the past, and we can learn from the future by using history as a mirror. Historians need to know not the successful ones but the old paths that have been taken. What we already know about the past is very

limited, but the authors who lived in that big environment at that time have a deep understanding, and we should pay attention to the world written by these authors. There may be some fiction in it, but I still think the society reflected in the book is real, and what the hero goes through is also what the people of that time went through. Therefore, we can understand the past more deeply.

So why choose to study literature and history across disciplines? I think there are three main reasons, which can be thought about in terms of literature, history and the similarities between the two. First, consider the characteristics of literature, such as image, creativity, emotion and time. Literary works reflect social life through concrete images, including characters, events, environment, etc. They are visible, audible, and felt concreteness and experience, and show a creative process, in which the writer uses imagination and fictional ability to transform real life into artistic images, often accompanied by strong emotional activities of the author. Convey the author's feelings and thoughts through artistic images. The contemporaneity is because literary works often bear the imprint of their creation period, reflecting the social conditions of that era, people's thoughts and feelings and aesthetic tastes, and even in some historical periods, literary works may have distinct class characteristics, reflecting the interests and views of a specific class. Then there are the characteristics of history: objectivity, continuity, complexity and explanation. Historical research relies on various types of evidence [15], including documents, relics, oral history, material culture, etc. Historical studies pursue the true restoration of past events and emphasise the importance of objective facts and evidence. We know that history is a continuous process, with causal connections between events, and historians understand the development of history by studying these connections. However, historical events usually involve multiple factors and variables, including economic, political, social, cultural, environmental, etc. So, to look deeper, the historian must not only record facts but also explain why events happened, which involves analysing and interpreting historical material. The relation between literature and history is quietly contained in their attributes. Because of history's explanatory nature and objectivity, historians often cannot glimpse the era through the cold monuments and sites. Still, the emergence of writing has brought historians a better way to perfect the explanation. Through reading [16] and decipherment, we can improve our understanding of that society through the epoch and class nature of literature, which is partial but also true. With the aid of literature, the perspective of history can be enlarged, and what we can understand will be richer and different. The charm of literature is infinite, so interdisciplinary cooperation is also essential [17].

### 3. Conclusion

The paper explores the intricate relationship between literature and historical events, highlighting how literature reflects and shapes its time's cultural, social, and political landscapes. The text emphasises the importance of understanding literature within its historical context to grasp its significance and its messages fully. It discusses how historical events and societal changes influence literary themes, genres, and styles and how literature can serve as a form of resistance or commentary on the status quo.

In this paper, we also examine the role of literature in preserving historical memory and providing insights into the experiences and perspectives of individuals and communities throughout different periods. It suggests that literature can offer a more nuanced and personal understanding of history, complementing traditional historical narratives. The analysis underscores the need for a multidisciplinary approach when studying literature, considering the historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts that shape literary works. This holistic perspective allows readers to appreciate the depth and complexity of literary texts and their relevance to both past and present issues.

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