

The Images of Peasants in Modern and Contemporary Societies Depicted in Zhao Shuli's Works

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Abstract:

Rural literature is indispensable content in studying modern and contemporary literature. As a modern and contemporary literature writer, Zhao Shuli's works are worthy of more comprehensive study. In changing times, the emancipation of thought and alternating the old and the new are urgent problems. This paper intends to take Zhao Shuli's works as an example to examine Zhao's perspectives on farmers and the images depicted in his works. The paper cites various kinds of literature to discuss farmers' problems and explore related issues depicted in Zhao Shuli's rural literature works. The paper argues that Zhao Shuli sought to shed light on the societal challenges and transformations unfolding in rural China during his time. Through his works, he aimed to give voice to the often marginalized and overlooked rural communities, highlighting their resilience, dignity, and humanity amidst the changing landscape of modernization and societal upheaval. Only by truly understanding farmers and rural areas can modern society make effective decisions and better promote rural development in the long term.

Keywords: Zhao Shuli; revolution; folk narrative; peasant culture; liberation.

1. Introduction

Rural literature is indispensable content in studying modern and contemporary literature. As a writer of modern and contemporary literature, Zhao Shuli did not forget his birth when writing. For him, the countryside and the people were rooted in the heart of life. He could not give up either of them. Under the historical changes of modern and contemporary social backgrounds, how to distribute the deserved benefits for farmers was the goal that Zhao Shuli had pursued throughout his life and his works. He combined politics with literary creation and firmly believed that only by holding power in the hands of the people could society truly benefit the broader masses of the people [1].

This paper intends to take Zhao Shuli's works from the perspective of farmers and the images of farmers depicted in his works as an example to discuss the problem of farmers and explore the necessity of emancipating the mind. The paper cites various kinds of literature to discuss farmers' problems and explore related issues. Only by truly understanding farmers and rural areas can modern society make effective decisions and better promote rural development in the long term.

2. Zhao Shuli's Attention for Farmers

Zhao Shuli, as one of the representative characters of Chinese modern and contemporary novelists, has an important position in the history of modern literature, and his works have a certain influence on modern Chinese literature. Born in a poor and ordinary rural family in Shanxi Province, Zhao Shuli has been interested in literature since his youth. Because of the environment in which he lived, peasant art was the most familiar to him. Under the influence of the May Fourth Movement and the New Literature Movement, Zhao Shuli took up pen and paper and began his literary creation in a particular style. His works primarily depict peasants and rural lives in China [2].

After the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, Zhao Shuli resolutely devoted himself to the anti-Japanese work. He joined the Chinese Communist Party and engaged in literature and artwork in the liberated areas. His creation has a strong local flavor. Represented by Zhao Shuli, this school of writers was called "Yam Egg School". He artistically processed and depicted the simple and ordinary rural life, vividly and concretely reflecting the rural life scenes of that time, aiming to embody his thoughts on peasants and the spirit of the times.

The Marriage of Xiao Erhei is a 1943 novella written by Zhao Shuli. It tells the story of a young man and woman

during the Anti-Japanese War. It is an artistic summary of a true story Zhao heard in Zuoquan County. The author sets the background to the early period of the establishment of the democratic regime, takes the emotional line of Xiaoqin and Xiao Erhei as the main line, and reveals the backward spiritual outlook of the countryside at that time and the remnants of feudal thoughts. Through vivid characters, the author also shows the peasants' plight and efforts in pursuing marriage freedom and emancipating their minds, reflecting the necessity of liberation [3].

3. The Images of Peasants in Zhao Shuli's "The Marriage of Xiao Erhei"

Zhao Shuli's "The Marriage of Xiao Erhei" is undoubtedly an indispensable classic work that discusses the interweaving of modern Chinese literature and society. Zhao Shuli created several distinctive peasant images in his novels. Among them, Er Zhuge and San Xianggu are two typical backward farmers. They are deeply affected by feudal superstition and old customs, and their ideas are outdated. In stark contrast to them are the young and progressive farmers, Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin. Despite family opposition and social pressure, the latter courageously pursue their happiness and freedom of marriage and finally succeed in getting married. This contrast between different groups of peasants shows the conflict and collision of old and new ideas and concepts in rural society at that time in China [4,5].

More importantly, the conflict of ideas depicted in the novel is not limited to rural society. Conceptual conflicts go deep into the psyche of each individual at that time. Each character faces a common challenge: maintaining personal integrity and emancipating one's mind amidst the rapid changes of modern society. The core message that Zhao Shuli wants to convey is the paramount importance of emancipating the minds through his literary works.

At the same time, the images of Er Zhuge and San Xianggu reveal the harm of the feudal remnants more deeply. Although they know that the affection between Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin is sincere, they oppose their marriage because of superstitions and old customs. This kind of regressive behavior not only hurts the feelings of young people but also hinders the progress of the whole society [6].

Through these compelling portrayals of rural peasants, Zhao Shuli successfully awakened people's vigilance against the residual forces of feudalism and advocated for the pursuit of emancipating the mind. From today's perspective, the Marriage of Xiao Erhei transcends its status as a literary masterpiece; it also emerges as an important work that reveals the ongoing conflict between human

nature and social norms. It encourages us to challenge old ideas and pursue true freedom and happiness while reminding us of the dangers of the enduring remnants of feudalism [7].

4. Reasons for Zhao Shuli's Choice of Taking Peasant Communities as His Writing Objects

The cultural background, and Zhao Shuli was born into a rural family, providing him with a deep understanding and firsthand experience of rural life. He was intimately familiar with the peasants' language, customs, and way of life, enabling him to observe and describe rural society from the peasants' perspective. In traditional Chinese society, farmers constituted the main body of society, and their lives and fates were closely linked with the changes in Chinese society. By choosing farmers as the main body to write, Zhao Shuli could more directly reflect Chinese society's main contradictions and problems at that time.

Expanding on this context, Zhao Shuli's upbringing in a rural environment imbued him with a deep empathy and connection with the struggles and aspirations of peasant life. His intimate knowledge of rural customs and traditions allowed him to portray the nuances and complexities of rural existence with authenticity and depth. Furthermore, by centering his narratives around the lives of farmers, Zhao Shuli sought to shed light on the societal challenges and transformations unfolding in rural China during his time. Through his works, he aimed to give voice to the often marginalized and overlooked rural communities, highlighting their resilience, dignity, and humanity amidst the changing landscape of modernization and societal upheaval.

The era in which Zhao Shuli lived was a time of tremendous change in Chinese society. During the Yan'an Rectification Movement, Mao Zedong held the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, where he stated: "Chinese revolutionary writers and artists, men of letters and artists who have a future, must go into the masses, must immerse themselves in the workers, peasants and soldiers for a long time, unconditionally and wholeheartedly, into the fervent struggle, into the single most vast and abundant source, to observe, experience, study and analyze all people, all classes and all masses, all living forms of life and forms of struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art, and only then is it possible for them to enter the creative process."

After the forum, literary and artistic workers were guided, found the direction, and began to devote themselves to the masses. As a young intellectual, Zhao Shuli naturally hoped to arouse farmers' self-awareness through his

works to promote the reform of rural society. He believed that only by truly reflecting the lives and emotions of the people can he create truly valuable works. Therefore, Zhao Shuli chose farmers as his creative theme based on his pursuit of truth and depth. Through the use of the language and stories of farmers, he could more directly touch the emotions of farmers readers and trigger their resonance. This contributed to the dissemination of his works and allowed his ideas to be more deeply rooted in people's hearts [8].

Therefore, from multiple perspectives, Zhao Shuli's choice to use the image of "farmer" for his writing and ideological expression not only stemmed from his personal experiences and emotions but also conformed to the practical needs of Chinese society at that time. At the same time, it was also his pursuit and innovation in literature and art [9].

5. Conclusion

By depicting the lives and emotions of farmers, Zhao Shuli successfully aroused readers' attention and sympathy for the peasant community. In the present society, despite the acceleration of urbanization, farmers still occupy a considerable part of the population. Zhao Shuli's works enable more people to understand the plight and pursuit of farmers, thus promoting attention to and solutions to farmers' problems.

The images of farmers in his works show the transformation and development of rural society. His works also describe the challenges and opportunities faced by rural areas in the process of modernization, providing a window for people to understand rural society deeply. They played an important role in promoting the development of the rural economy and improving farmers' living conditions in Chinese society.

Furthermore, the images of peasants in Zhao Shuli's works also reflect the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese culture and values in rural areas. Through the description of peasant families, marriage, ethics, and other issues, he enabled more individuals to discover the charm and value of traditional culture. This is of positive

significance to the protection and inheritance of traditional culture [10].

Therefore, in contemporary society, the images of peasants depicted in Zhao Shuli's works still have an important influence and significance for rural communities. By understanding Zhao Shuli's peasant images, individuals can better understand the past, present, and future of China's rural areas so as to make positive contributions to promoting the development and progress of rural areas.

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