On Mao Dun’s Two “Lost Pearls” and His Thoughts in Xinjiang Daily

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This paper takes Mr. Mao Dun’s “Some Important Meanings Obtained from the Painting Exhibition” and “About the Characters in the Novel” published in Xinjiang Daily as the research object to explore his literary thoughts. He adhered to the utilitarian literary and artistic view of “guiding life”, dialectically absorbed foreign literary theories such as “naturalism” and “positivism”, focused on reality, emphasized the author’s correct outlook on life, world outlook and positive attitude towards life, paid more attention to the experience and perception of public life, constantly enriched and expanded the literary connotation of revolutionary realism, and made outstanding contributions to the popularization and popularization of literature and art in Xinjiang.

Keywords: Mao Dun, popularization, social function, realism, materialist dialectics

Introduction

With the surging international politics in the 20th century, Chinese literature has experienced ups and downs under the influence of various complex factors of the times. Mao Dun, a literary giant, once spent a year in Xinjiang. Due to the lack of information, most of his works have been obliterated. In recent years, a lot of works had gradually been found. For example, Jing Libin excavated and combed five translations of Mao Dun in Xinjiang in Xinjiang Daily and published them in the Journal of Xinjiang University. However, the author found that there were two papers: “Some Important Meanings Obtained from the Painting Exhibition” and “About the Characters in the Novel” published in Xinjiang Daily. They are also “auspicious plumes” scattered by Mao Dun outside the collection, but they are not included in the complete works of Mao Dun (2014 Edition) and the complete compilation of materials on the history of Chinese Literature—research materials of Mao Dun (2010 Edition). These two “Lost Pearls” not only have important literary and historical value, but also provide new materials and vision for the research of Mao Dun and his works in the academic circles.

Overview of Mao Dun’s Cultural Activities in Xinjiang

In Xinjiang in the early 1930s, economy was depressed and culture was backward. After the “April 12 Revolution” leaded by the “Three Young Heroes” of Xinjiang, Sheng Shicai won speculation and took the

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lead in governing Xinjiang. With the help of the Soviet Union, he calmed the civil strife and embarked on the political line of “Pro Soviet United Communist Party” and implemented the political program of “Six Major Policies” with the content of “pro Soviet, anti imperialist, integrity, construction and peace”. At that time, the policy created a good political environment for the development of various industries in Xinjiang, and successfully attracted a large number of men with high ideals such as Mao Dun, Zhang Zhongshi, Zhao Dan and Wang Yi to Xinjiang. They “opened up territory and territory” in the cultural field and made outstanding contributions to the rapid development of cultural undertakings in Xinjiang.

When Mao Dun first arrived in Xinjiang, He served as chairman of the Xinjiang Cultural Association and Minister of the Ministry of art. His main task was to lead and communicate the work of the Cultural Promotion Association of all ethnic groups, trained cultural cadres of all ethnic groups, hold various literary and artistic publicity and speech activities, and promoted the development of cultural undertakings in Xinjiang. Combined with his own literary activities and practical experience, Mao Dun, on the one hand, continued to explore the law of the development of art itself, on the other hand, combined with the actual situation of the political, economic and cultural development, took literature as a weapon to serve the reality, guided writers’ writing, advocated “literature and art to the countryside”, combined literary and artistic publicity with “Popularization”, and actively participated in the “cultural salvation” movement while promoting the development of various cultural undertakings in Xinjiang. He had deep feelings about the development of cultural undertakings in Xinjiang: seven years ago, culturally, Xinjiang was a desert. In addition, “the scarcity of population and the inconvenience of transportation are also rare in all provinces of the country. Therefore, the difficulty of developing culture here can be said to be ten times that of other provinces and regions in the mainland.” The 400,000 people in Xinjiang included 14 nationalities, and their languages, customs, habits and even economic and cultural standards were different. It was very difficult to carry out cultural work, which is not owned by other provinces in the mainland (Mao Dun, 1940, pp. 14-15).

The Criterion of “Art for Life and Guide Life” in the Comments of “Painting Exhibition”

On October 28, 1939, a large-scale collective painting exhibition was held for the first time in Dihua area, Xinjiang. It was exhibited more than 750 works for eight days, with works sent by local writers such as Shu GuQing and Liu baiheng and Lu Shaofei, known as the “ancestor of modern Chinese cartoonists”. In addition to this, there were 17 groups with a total of 20,000 visitors (Dai, 1939). It can be imagined that the grand occasion of the exhibition at that time.

Mao Dun’s “Some Important Meanings Obtained from the Painting Exhibition” was a summary comment on the exhibition. Mao Dun gave a positive evaluation of the “significance” of the exhibition. He repeatedly stressed that painters and viewers were “common in all aspects”, that is to say, people from all walks of life and nationalities, whether rich or poor, male or female, old or young, could participate in the exhibition activities as “painters” or “viewers” and received artistic infection and education. Secondly, it emphasized that the theme of this exhibition reflected “reality”, which focused on the war of resistance against Japan and saving the country, the construction of Xinjiang and the real life of people in the province, and followed the artistic expression of “realism”. Mao Dun was a scholar whose literary and artistic thought focuses on the overall situation, paid attention to guidance, and took “expressing life and guiding life” as the main criticism criterion. Especially
during the Anti Japanese War, the criticism style of emphasizing social utility ran through. Here, “Art for people” was by no means a life of one family, but a life of one society and one nation (Mao Dun, 1981). The implication is that literature and art should truly reflect life, express people’s feelings and life hardships, awaken people and inspire people’s hearts. The form of art could be various forms that are familiar and easily accepted by all ethnic groups, such as different forms of dancing, singing, music and clothing, different lyrics and languages, and different melodies of actions and sound waves. As long as the forms conducive to content expression can be used. The content to be expressed “is full of the people’s life color and consciousness emotion”, “it should be suitable for the people’s interest, but at the same time, it should improve the people’s interest” (Mao Dun, 1940, p. 28).

Mao Dun’s comments on his works are all based on the subject matter and content, which does not suffer from “proficiency of skills” but “emptiness of content” (Mao Dun, 1939). He attaches great importance to the choice of theme because he believes that the choice of theme can show the writer’s life attitude and world outlook. It is also to judge the degree of fit between its content and “Modernity” and “sociality” from the correlation between theme and real life. It is also the most convenient to examine the writer’s new contribution to the literary world (Wen, 1993, p. 90). Of course, such a one-sided emphasis on the utilitarianism of art “publicity” and “education” is the political demand of “Anti Japanese War and national salvation”, while the stranding of creative artistic aesthetics, the neglect of the expression of the author’s emotion and imagination, and the pursuit of creative personality are contrary to the law of art. Such an artistic choice is the most “pale” regret in the era of war. The conflict and contradiction between content and form, politics and art of this criticism is also self-evident. If we use artistic means to express the thoughts of life, so that readers can not only enjoy the “artistic beauty” of art, but also better “reveal life” and then “guide life”.

Based on “Reality” and Absorbing the Foreign Literary Theories in Dialectics
—An Interpretation of” About the Characters in the Novel”

The other is About the Characters in the Novel, which was originally published in the special series of literary and artistic creation theory of Xinjiang Daily on June 8, 1941. Mao Dun believed that writers were often confused by the grasp of the internal “essence” of characters.

First, it is prone to subjective prejudice, and the observation is not deep enough. Although the characters and stories are fictional, “they are not made up only by fantasy, but from actual observation and experience” (Mao Dun, 1981, p. 156). In other words, to avoid subjectivism and idealism literature, we should respect and pursue objective truth, and combine the writer’s unique life experience and field observation with the artistic practice of typical creation. In fact, this is also the result of his learning and digestion of Zola’s “naturalism” on the basis of realism, He once said, “in 1934, I began to take an objective analytical attitude towards naturalism. At that time, I was a tendency of ‘naturalism’ and old realism” (Mao Dun, 1990, p. 43). Of course, he did not absorb naturalism completely, but took a critical view. He pursued truth, and believed that the disadvantage of naturalism was that he paid too much attention to objective description, despised the author’s subjective opinions and artistic imagination, and was too inclined to mechanical materialism. Therefore, in the process of seeking “truth” in his “field observation” and “objective description”, he paid more attention to the writer’s “experience” and “real feeling” in pursuit of the essence of social life. Without “real feeling”, his works are
easy to be conceptualized. With “real feeling” without “experience”, the content is difficult to be deeply
engraved. “The writer’s’ sense of reality ‘must be the experience of life struggle’. However, the ‘sense of
reality’ obtained in this way is only a kind of raw material. These raw materials must be subject to the writer’s
subjective analysis and criticism, then refined, and then formed into a theme” (Mao Dun, 1939).

Second, Mao Dun’s view is that “the writer’s attitude towards social Vientiane and personnel evolution. In
this way, it is close to the objective truth” (Mao Dun, 1939). The progressive world outlook is his “microscope”
for analyzing real life, while the fixed political position is his “yardstick” for criticizing real society (Mao Dun,
1939). In fact, Mao Dun dialectically added the element of “writer’s personality” based on the three elements of
“Taylor”: race, era and environment. In Mao Dun’s opinion, literary works, as the external expression of the
writer’s emotions, his attitude towards life, his outlook on life and world outlook are integrated into the works.
Only when the author maintains a positive attitude towards life and a correct concept of progress, can he
embody a healthy and positive “personality quality” in his works and give play to the social effect of “guiding
life”. In Mao Dun’s own words, it means “accepting the consciousness of proletariat who created the society”
(Mao Dun, 1991, p. 309). However, Mao Dun ignored the outlook on life and world outlook reflecting the
“writer’s personality”, which can not represent the writer’s creative techniques and artistic picture. Literary
creation is originally the intercourse of complex mental and spiritual activities. This kind of judgment that
frames the writer’s creative intention and spiritual value orientation is undoubtedly to abandon the “artistic
value”, which is easier to make the works fall into the same “pattern” nest, leading to the far fetched ideology
or the “homogenization” tendency of the conclusion.

In the third point, Mao Dun emphasizes that the relationship between characters and society and between
people should be viewed from the perspective of connection, and people should not be viewed in isolation.
Every man is a social man. We should connect man with the surrounding social environment, and his social
value is also determined in complex social relations. This is Mao Dun’s internalization of the main
philosophical proposition of Marxism—“man’s essence is the sum of social relations”, and then combined with
practice, it is concretely applied to the characterization of characters in the novel, which is explained in easy to
understand language, containing rich theoretical connotation, Starting from the internal essence, human
“personality” and “universality” are unified to realize the specific, objective and historical understanding of
human in the universal sense.

The last point emphasizes that to look at people from the perspective of development, we should not only
see “human development” and “social development”, but also understand all aspects of society—that is,
changes are taking place around people from time to time. The changes of people accumulate and become the
changes of social Vientiane, and the changes of social Vientiane affect people and make them change (Mao
Dun, 1939). Obviously, it can be seen that Mao Dun’s literary and artistic thought shines with the philosophical
light of Marxist historical materialism and dialectics. It looks at the dialectical unity between social
development and human development. With only a few strokes, it makes a penetrating and rational analysis.
People and the social environment are two sides of contradictions. There are setbacks and stagnation in the
process of their development, but the general trend is progress in the continuous struggle.

As in the end, he taught writers that literary theory did not lie in memorizing by rote, but in
“understanding” and “digesting” theory. It is also Mao Dun’s attitude towards foreign thoughts. The
nourishment of foreign literature he absorbed is “pluralistic”, and it is also a dialectical transformation of “Sinicization”. Starting from the current situation of China’s literary and artistic development, Mao Dun regarded “art for life and guiding life” as the standard of literary and artistic criticism, constantly pursued the exploration and innovation of literary theory, and dialectically added the analysis of “author personality” on the basis of Taine’s “three elements”; He accepted the “elite part” of “Zola’s Naturalism”—field observation and objective description. At the same time, he also abandoned the “mechanical scientific experiment and pure objective description; he did not blindly “copy only the novelty” and “swallow alive” the “Soviet Socialist Realism”. On the basis of adhering to the tradition of realism, he actively explored and studied the Marxist view of literature and art, and constantly pursued the innovation of literary theory in combination with reality.

Mao Dun’s positive attitude towards life, correct values, firm proletarian political position and the “pluralistic” absorption of the nourishment of foreign literary theory and the rigorous attitude of “dialectical treatment” determine the theoretical height of his literary thought. On the one hand, he absorbed the nourishment of materialist dialectics in his “tracing the origin of poverty” for foreign literary and artistic views, which made the new literary creation and the artistic proposition of “for life” sublimate and complement each other, and further enriched the connotation of realistic literary and artistic theory. At the same time, the “general” literature and art at that time believed that “all literature is propaganda”, so the novel creation is full of “slogans” and has the tendency of “idealism and mechanism”. Mao Dun emphasizes the author’s “experience of real life” and pays attention to the author’s “sense of reality” of life. The character description focuses on the description of “typical characters”, which is a valuable progress, also played a certain “correction” significance. “Dogmatism” and “subjectivism” spreading in the camp of revolutionary literature do not start from China’s current situation and history, blindly copy the dogma of Marxist Leninist theory, He enlightened the wisdom of the people, spread new culture, promoted the development of literary and artistic theory, guided the writers in wartime Xinjiang to further comprehensively and deeply understand and apply the Marxist concept of literature and art, and promoted the development of its “Sinicization”, which played a role in pushing waves and waves.

**Conclusion**

On the road of adhering to realistic literature, Mao Dun, whether absorbing and learning foreign literary criticism theories in “pluralism” or inheriting and abandoning domestic literary traditions, can combine literary practical experience, closely follow the political theme of the times, strive to give full play to the social function of literature “guiding life”, while taking into account the exploration of the essence and regularity of literature, and put forward many insights, This forward-looking and inclusive view of literature and art reflects a scholar’s academic feelings of inclusiveness and seeking common ground while reserving differences. As revolutionary writers, literature is their weapon in the revolutionary struggle. Although sometimes the respect and emphasis on the law of art can not get rid of the barriers of the times and political factors, and the construction of artistic aesthetic space such as “personality”, “emotional rendering” and “creative style” of works is also the stranded value pursuit of writers and critics in the revolutionary era, his criticism is based on reality and focuses on the whole, The key point is always to connect with the “Popularization” of literature and
art at that time, and pay attention to the rational judgment of practical significance and spiritual value, which has important theoretical guiding significance.

References