

Analyzing Azorín's Influence on the Writers of the Beijing Literary School and Its Reasons

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Abstract: Azorín is a representative writer of the Generation of 1898. His books, once translated into Chinese in the 1920s, aroused the interest and admiration of the writers of the Beijing literary school, and more or less influenced the creations of Wang Zengqi, Bian Zhilin, Lu Fen, He Qifang, Tang Tao, Li Guangtian and others. This paper consists of five sections. The first chapter gives a brief introduction to Azorín and the writers of Beijing Literary School and points out the purpose of this paper. The second chapter takes Wang Zengqi, Bian Zhilin and Lu Fen's works as examples to expound the influence of Azorín on the writers of the Beijing Literary School from three aspects: stylistic features, image application and material selection. The third chapter then analyzes the reasons for this effect. In the fourth chapter, the author thinks about the factors that influence the international dissemination of literary works and draws great inspiration in the creation and diffusion of national literatures from this research. The fifth chapter concludes what has been stated above, and emphasizes that the open attitude of the writers of Beijing Literary School toward foreign literature can bring some enlightenment to promoting the contemporary national literature creation being more eclectic and inclusive.

Keywords: Azorín, Beijing Literary School, influence of foreign literature

1. Introduction

Azorín (1873-1967), whose real name was José Martínez Ruiz, was born in the province of Alicante, Spain. He was an excellent writer, critic, and stylist. He came from a wealthy middle-class family and entered the University of Valencia to study law in 1888. His representative works are *El Diario de un Enfermo* (Diary of a Sick Person), *La Voluntad* (The Will), *La Andalucía Trágica* (The Tragic Andalusia), etc.

"Beijing Literary School" refers to a group of Chinese writers who were active in some publications such as *Camel Grass*, *Literary Supplement to Da Gung Paper*, *Xuewen*, *Mercury*, *Literary Quarterly*, and *Literary Magazine* in the 1930s and 1940s, mainly including teachers and students from Peking University, Tsinghua University and Yanjing University.

In 1898, Spain was defeated in the Spanish-American War and was forced to give up its last colonies, when the country started to go downhill. Across the sea, after the May Fourth Movement, China saw a boom in the translation of foreign literature, in which the works of the writers of the Generation of 1898 represented by Azorín were translated into China in large numbers as literature

of marginalized nationalities [1]. In the early 1930s, thanks to translations by Xu Xiacun and Dai Wangshu, Azorín became popular in the academia in Beijing.

This paper mainly uses the method of comparative analysis to explore the similarities between Azorín and the writers of the Beijing Literary School in their creations and explores the deep connection between them by analyzing the social and historical backgrounds and the personal creation philosophy of Azorín, meanwhile, also aims for finding the factors that influence the international dissemination of literary works and bringing inspiration for contemporary national literature to go abroad.

2. Three Main Influences of Azorín on the Beijing Literary School

2.1. Stylistic Features—Take Wang Zengqi as An Example

Xu Xiacun was the first translator to introduce Azorín's works in China. In December 1928, his translation of Azorín's novel *Los Toros* (*The Fighting Bulls*) was published in the eighth issue of a literary journal: *Trackless Train*. He noted: "Azorín's greatest contribution to the recent history of Spanish literature is his style, which is brief and clear, without the stereotypes, rhetorical phrases, parallelisms and contrasts of traditional prose..." [2]. Azorín himself also advocates for the reform and innovation of styles in literature. He believes that the correct and smooth dialogue in the novel is hypocritical, because a person only uses short, incorrect and natural sentences in daily life, speaking incoherently and intermittently. The so-called structure of novel should not exist at all, considering that life has no structure and is not as neat and boxy as it is in novels [2]. Wang Zengqi agreed with them, he did not approve of formulating the structure of novels, either. He proposed that "How many novels there are, how many structural methods there are" and "The style of life is the style of novels". In *Una Ciudad Castellana* (*A Town Castilian*), Azorín begins like this, turning the scene and the atmosphere into the true protagonist:

Example 1:

"La ciudad está edificada en una ladera; al pie corre un riachuelo. El término es extenso; se compone de tierras paniegas y de olivares; el trigo lo muelen en las aceñas del río, y el aceite lo fabrican en vetustas y toscas prensas de viga. Las calles de la ciudad son estrechas y turtuosas; algunas tienen soportales sostenidos por pilastras y antiguas y rotas columnas de piedras. Hay calles que se llaman: de las Dueñas, las Angustias, Boteros, Tenerías, Colegio Viejo, la Encomienda, la Puerta Rota, Bachilleres, Pan y Carbón, Tahonas Viejas, Bermejeros, Donados, Labrador Chico" [3].

(The town is built on a hillside, at its foot runs a stream. The town is extensive; it is made up of wheat fields and olive gardens; the wheat is being ground in the water mills by the river, and the oil is being manufactured in ancient and crude screw presses. The streets of the town are narrow and winding; some have arcades supported by pilasters and ancient and broken stone columns. There are streets called: Nuns, Anguish, Barrel Vendor, Tannery, Old School, Recommendation, Broken Door, Bachelor, Bread and Carbon, Old Bakeries, Auburn, Lay Brothers, Young Farmers.)

On the other hand, Wang Zengqi's *Death of a Swan* uses short, poetic sentences as well as dialogue to advance the story. For example:

Example 2:

“他命令白蕤跳《天鹅之死》。”

‘你不是说《天鹅之死》就是美吗？你给我跳，跳一夜！’

录音机放出了音乐。音乐使她忘记了眼前的一切，她快乐。

她跳《天鹅之死》。

她羞耻。

她跳《天鹅之死》。

她愤怒” [4].

(“He orders Bai Rui to dance *Death of a Swan*.

‘Didn’t you say that *Death of a Swan* is beautiful? Then dance it! Dance the whole night!’

The radio plays the music. Music lets her forget what she is going through, she is happy.

She dances *Death of a Swan*.

She is ashamed.

She dances *Death of a Swan*.

She is exasperate.)

From the two fragments it can be seen that the two novels have the same innovation in terms of style: they are similar to prose, prose poetry and even poetry. Azorín and Wang Zengqi’s novels do not have a coherent plot and are usually made up of a series of scene descriptions. They do not directly describe the personality or psychology of the protagonist, nor do they deliberately organize the activities of the character and the development of the plot [5]. Their novels are more like an objective record of dialogue, environment or atmosphere, creating a figurative feel and clear image for readers.

2.2. Image Application—Take Bian Zhilin as An Example

Azorín’s prose is usually short and clear, standing out for describing the details of life that people easily overlook. His description is thorough, clear and delicate. Therefore, despite his status as an essayist, he is also equipped with a poetic temperament and has a profound influence on many poets of the Beijing Literary School. Among them, Bian Zhilin is the one who respected him the most. In *He Qifang’s Translation of Poems in His Later Years*, Bian Zhilin once said candidly: “There is an influence that few people seem to notice. The prose of Azorín influenced poets like Dai Wangshu and He Qifang...and even myself” [6]. Azorín’s writings are fine and simple: the objects and images that appear in his prose are all everyday and subtle, and there are no strange or transcendental scenes. For example, the cricket chirps all the day in *La Fiesta(The Festival)*, the carnation in *Los Toros(The Fighting Bulls)*, the rough bench in *Una elegía(An Elegy)*, the gray stone in *En Loyola(In Loyola)* [7], etc. In terms of image selection, Bian Zhilin also chooses trivial objects or scenes that can be seen everywhere to express his feelings and understandings [8], such as shadows, small stones, waves, a basket of carrots, grasses at the foot of the wall, etc. This smooth and simple style of writing may be largely formed in the process of his translation of Azorín’s works.

Another object that Azorín writes very often is the ordinary people in small towns. He often describes small rural towns in Spain and pays attention to the common people and the daily life of lower class workers in difficult times [9]. For example, in *Los Sostenes de la Patria(The Pillars of the Country)*, he wrote:

Example 3:

—Todos estos hombre, todos estos enfermos que hemos visto, son pobres: necesitan carne, caldo, leche. Ve usted la ironía aterradora que hay en recomendar estas cosas a quien no disponen ni aun para comprar pan del más negro? Y esto ha de repetirse todos los días en todas las casas forzosamente, fatalmente... Y la minería va creciendo, extendiéndose, invadiéndolo todo: las ciudades, los campos, las aldeas. Casi todos los enfermos que acabamos de ver, señor Azorín, son tuberculosos: éste es el mal de Andalucía. No se come; la falta de nutrición trae la anemia; la anemia acarrea la tisis. En

Madrid, la mortalidad es del 34 por 100; en Sevilla rebasa esta cifra; en este pueblo donde ejerzo, en Lebrija, pasa del 40 por 100 [10].

(All these men, all these sick people that we have seen, are poor: they need meat, broth, milk. Do you see the terrifying irony in recommending these things to those who don't even have the resources to buy the blackest bread? And this has to be repeated every day in every house, necessarily, fatally...And mining is growing, spreading, invading everywhere: the cities, the fields, the villages. Almost all the patients we have just seen, Mr. Azorín, are tuberculous: this is the disease of Andalusia. People here don't eat; lack of nutrition brings anemia; anemia leads to phthisis. In Madrid, the mortality is 34 percent; in Seville it exceeds this figure; in this town where I work, in Lebrija, it exceeds 40 percent.)

These small-town characters also appear frequently in Bian Zhilin's poems. For example, it is written in *Several People*: “叫卖的喊一声‘冰糖葫芦’，吃一口灰像满不在乎” (A peddler shouts ‘sugar gourd’, dust enters his mouth but he doesn't care), “当一个年轻人在荒街上沉思，有些人捧着一碗饭叹息” [11]; (When a young man ruminates on a deserted street, someone sighs holding a bowl of rice); In *Dream of An Old Town*: “瞎子在街上走，一步又一步。他知道哪一块石头高，哪一块石头低，哪一家姑娘有多大年纪” [6]. (The blind man walks on the street, step by step. He knows very well which stone is tall, which is low, and how old are the daughters in the town). It described a cold and lonely town, and the different lives of the people in the desolate streets. Both Azorín and Bian Zhilin have the same concerns about the lives of people in the lower class.

2.3. Material Selection—Take Lu Fen as An Example

The writers of Beijing Literary School include Tang Tao, Li Guangtian, Jin Kemu and others, all of whom think highly of Azorín and his works. Among them, Lu Fen (also known as “Shi Tuo”), who has always devoted himself to the creation of novels and prose, is the one that deserves to be analyzed separately. His works contain obvious traces of Azorín's influence. Lu Fen's friends, such as Bian Zhilin, Zeng Zhuo and others, also mentioned the similarities between his and Azorín's creations in their articles related to Lu Fen. In terms of the selection of materials in prose, Azorín's description of decaying rural towns in Spain, as in *Una Ciudad Castellana* (*A Town Castilian*): “La techumbre se halla desfondada; crecen unos jaramagos en lo alto de las paredes...las capillitas que sirven de estaciones aparecen medio desmoronadas, en ruinas.” [3]; (The roof is collapsed; Some weeds grow on top of the walls...the chapels that serve as stations appear half-demolished, in ruins.) and the desolate, stained glass and bell tower down the street in *The Baker*; “y de qué manera comienzan a marchar los pocos y vetustos telares que aún perduran, como sobrecogidos, como atemorizados, como ocultos en un lóbrego zaguán, allá en una calleja empinada y silenciosa;” (and how the few ancient textile workshops that still survive begin to work, as if overwhelmed, as if frightened, as if hidden in a gloomy hallway, down a steep and silent alley;); in *Una Elegía* (*An Elegy*); and the sentimental, lyrical, gray and melancholic art style of Azorín, both of them gave Lu Fen a great touch and infection, of which can be caught a glimpse in *The Orchard Town*, the author also describes the decay and desolation of the small town in a sad and melancholy tone:

Example 4:

“它没有电灯，没有工厂，没有像样的商店，所有的生意都被隔着河的坐落在十里外的车站吸收去了。因此它永远繁荣不起来，不管世界怎么样变动。”

“这是一处破落公馆，我们在各处小城里都可以看见许多这种公馆……这厅堂是常常关闭着的，每年人们进去打扫三次，至多五次” [12].

“There is no lights, no factories, no decent shops, all businesses were lost to the station ten miles across the river. So it never thrives, no matter how the world changes.”

“This is a run-down mansion. We can see many of these mansions in every small town...this hall is often closed, people go in and clean it three times a year, at most five times.”)

The orchard town described by Lu Fen is certainly the microcosm of many small rural towns in China at the time. Facing the dilapidated town, he showed deep melancholy and sadness. His description and Azorín's writing of the towns and cities in decline show the same cultural characteristics and sentiments.

3. The Reasons for Azorín's Influence on the Beijing Literary School

3.1. Similar National Conditions of Spain and China

In the 1898 Spanish-American War, Spain was once again defeated by the United States and lost its last foreign colonies. When the news of the failure arrived, the whole country was shocked, disillusion and pessimism suddenly took hold of all of Spain. This exposed the debauchery and corruption of the ruling group and the decadence of monarchy. In this context, the Generation of 1898 was born. These intellectuals spoke out in national affairs, trying to save their homeland from the crisis. As a representative of the Generation of 1898, Azorín's works are also full of concerns for the homeland and the future [13]. Turning back to the Chinese social background at that time: after the First World War, China failed in the negotiation of the Paris Peace Conference, which caused, as a consequence, the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement, which hit Japanese imperialism and the weak government of the Beiyang Army.

Additionally, the New Culture Movement was launched. All sectors of society were demanding the propaganda of revolutionary democratic ideas and criticizing the old governance system and old morals. At this time, the sense of decline and decay of the Western capitalist world and Chinese feudal society unexpectedly coincided. That is why the works of Azorín can give the writers of the Beijing Literary School a familiar sense.

3.2. Similar Views on Stylistic Innovation

The writers of Beijing Literary School have a strong consciousness of style, they often actively carry out stylistic experiments, remove the barriers between novels, prose and poetry, and absorb the effective elements of prose and poetry in their novels [13]. The structure, language, imagery, artistic conception and construction of the system have been renewed and the style of lyrical novels since the May Fourth Movement has been developed, focusing on subjectivity, ideas and emotions. Literature is considered as the expression of the vision of life and the search for the value of life. The writers of the Beijing Literary School emphasized expressing human nature and hoped that literature could participate in social transformation ethically and aesthetically [14]. Azorín, in turn, also advocated a stylistic reform: he believed that novels should be, like life, “diverse, multifaceted, fluid and contradictory”. His works have no important figures or events, nor emerging emotions [15], but present some impressionistic images to the readers in the form of prose. This creative aesthetics strike a chord with many writers of the Beijing Literary School.

3.3. Similar Concept of Life and Identity

One of the most notable characteristics of the literature of the Beijing Literary School is the local literature (literature of the native land), which implies the writer's own identity. All of them were more or less influenced by the May Fourth Movement, thus left their hometowns and came to Peiping(previous name for Beijing), the birthplace of the campaign. What awaits them, however, is

not a vigorous new school of thought or new forces, but a cultural capital under the rule of the renegade to the revolutionary group. The awareness of the gap between dream and reality makes them involuntarily develop their love and longing for their homeland [16], and regard it as the ideal place for beauty under the disappointment of reality. In Azorín's works, the attention to small towns, common people, and the loss of the spiritual home of the Spanish in a declining social environment also coincides with the cultural identity needs of the writers of the Beijing Literary School. In addition, the outlook on life that Azorín expresses in his works is similar to that of Lao-Tse and Chuang-Tse. In his novel *Vida de un Labrantín* (Life of a farmer), the protagonist lives a bumpy life, separated from his wife and children, and lives in poverty all along. But he is still able to continue his life without being influenced by the sorrows or joys brought by the outside world, enjoying own spiritual peace and happiness [5]. Azorín's emphasis on ordinary life and humanitarian sentiments complements the Beijing Literary School's praise of original human nature and the beauty of human sentiments [17].

4. Inspirations for International Dissemination of Literary works

4.1. Factors that Influence the International Dissemination of National Literature

Below are some factors that play important roles in literature spread:

a) The social environment and the needs of society in the destination country: in the event that Azorín's works were introduced in China, it was due to the need to emancipate the mind and illuminate the wisdom of the people after the May Fourth Movement, then the literature of marginalized nationalities was translated at the time. Chinese literati encountered the works of Spanish literary masters of the Generation of 1898, such as Azorín, Baroja and Unamuno.

b) Positive comments of well-known foreign writers: the reason why Azorín has widely attracted the attention of Beijing school writers in China is inseparable from an article by Mr. Zhou Zuoren published in *Camel Grass* magazine, *The Ancient Town of Spain • The Fiancée of Cervantes* [18].

c) Internationally renowned literary prizes: for example, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was quickly translated into more than 40 languages after winning the Nobel Prize for Literature and spread throughout the world.

d) Personal preferences of the translator: three important translators of Azorín's works are Xu Xiacun, Dai Wangshu and Bian Zhilin. Among them, Dai Wangshu and Bian Zhilin even learned Spanish to translate his books due to their love for Spanish literature or Azorín himself [6].

e) Innovation in literary styles or creative techniques: innovative developments in this field will naturally attract foreign language and literature lovers or translators for translation and dissemination.

f) Relationship between countries and the international situation: such as the translation and introduction of Soviet literature after the founding of New China.

g) The subject of the work: if the work is directed to the social situation of a certain nation, it is possible that it will not resonate in the communication process outside the country. However, if the theme of the play is life, death, love, and other life themes common to all human beings, it may be beneficial to provide unique national viewpoints for the rest of the world.

h) Adaptation to film, television series and radio: after a literary work is adapted into a film or television series, it is more likely to be accepted by the public. For example, several works by Ibáñez have been adapted into Hollywood movies, which are popular in the United States.

4.2. Inspirations for National Literature Creation and Diffusion

This illustrates that in the contemporary era. If people want to expand the readership of national literature, the demands of the international community, the trend and bias of the times, and the interests of contemporary people must be taken into consideration. In addition to focusing on the

domestic reality, it must also have a human and global perspective, but at the same time its own national characteristics must not be lost due to an excessive pursuit for internationalization. It is also necessary to strengthen exchanges with prestigious foreign scholars and writers, to seek advances and innovations in the field of pure literature and art, and to expand the influence of the domestic film and television industry. The field of literature can be moderately commercialized, since above all, the national literary works must enter the world view first, then it is possible to attract more people to take the initiative to understand the full picture and the true appearance of the national literature. Lastly, the education of literary translation talents should be strengthened and that will promote the internationalization of national literary works.

5. Conclusion

After Azorín's works were introduced to China in the 1920s, they have influenced various writers of Beijing Literary School to varying degrees in terms of styles, application of images, and selection of materials. The reasons for this influence consist of the similarity of national conditions and social backgrounds, between Spain and China, as well as the coincidence in stylistic innovation and the complementarity of outlooks on life and identity between the writers of the Beijing Literary School and Azorín. Drawing inspiration in this influence of Spanish literature on Chinese literature, the author has discovered 8 influential factors of international dissemination of national literature, based on some suggestions that have been proposed to provide help for the internationalization of national literature.

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