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The Overseas Dissemination of Lu Xun's Classics: The Rewriting and Embodiment of National Character Thought in Lu Xun's Works in Southeast Asian Chinese-Language Literature

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Abstract. Lu Xun is one of the most prominent literary masters in modern China. With incisive perspectives and a sharp writing style, he reflects social reality, leaving a profound impression on the Chinese people. Meanwhile, his thoughts have spread across the world. In particular, rewritings of some of Lu Xun's classic works have emerged in many trends of Chinese-language literature, exerting an extensive and profound influence on overseas Chinese-language literature of that period, which also contributes to research on the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature.

Keywords: Lu Xun, rewriting, national character, Chinese-language literature, spiritual victory method

1. Introduction

In Southeast Asia, "there have emerged Lu Xun-style tones, forms and styles, and Lu Xun's influence has continued to this day [1]." Among all of Lu Xun's works, *The True Story of Ah Q* is the most widely circulated in Southeast Asia. The entire novel is written with irony and indirect expression, a writing technique that can be regarded as highly distinctive. Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q* inherits the tradition of Chinese classical satirical novels. At the same time, drawing on his overseas study experience, he also absorbed elements from many foreign satirical works. The combination of implicit satire gave birth to the legendary masterpiece *The True Story of Ah Q*. In this regard, it also contributed to the sensation caused by Lu Xun's works a hundred years ago, so much so that they have exerted great influence overseas and across various Southeast Asian countries.

2. Rewriting: Lu Xun's classics and Southeast Asian Chinese-language literature

Lu Xun's works have spread widely in Southeast Asia with far-reaching influence, and their large-scale dissemination was mainly driven by literary periodicals in the region. Take *Jiao Feng*, a representative literary journal in Malaysia, as an example. It is the longest-running pure literary journal in Malaysian history. Although it has ceased publication now, it left a profound impact on

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literary masters of that time. The literary works it published are all classics, with important reference value for the Southeast Asian literary circle. Authors of *Jiao Feng* at home and abroad unanimously regard Lu Xun's works as a benchmark for the stylistic revolution of Chinese new literature. Take Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q* as an example. In different periods, many Chinese-language writers in Southeast Asia have borrowed its characters, plots and thoughts. For instance, Xu Xu's *Biography of Ah Q* adapts the character Ah Q from Lu Xun's original work, and *The Unofficial Biography of Ah Q: "Beauty is Greatness"*, which incorporates local Nanyang characteristics, serves as a sequel to the original work. There are also Li Long's *Ah Q Reincarnated*, Lin Wanjing's *Later Biography of Ah Q* and so on. This proves that Lu Xun's literary works remain vibrant in Southeast Asian Chinese-language literature, representing an uninterrupted form of dissemination. These works have successfully absorbed the core of the "spiritual victory method" from *The True Story of Ah Q* without losing their originality. They are works born from the combination of Chinese-language literature and Nanyang culture. In Malaysian Chinese literary works, narrators often use the image of Ah Q for teasing, self-mockery or irony, while a few writers make clever adaptations of it. This is a reference to the writing technique of Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q*, and a classic recurrence of Lu Xun's works. In the early stage of the dissemination of Lu Xun's works in Southeast Asia, many Southeast Asian Chinese-language writers imitated and adapted his works. Take Bai Di's novel *Dregs* as an example. The personality traits of some characters in the work are similar to those in Lu Xun's works. The pickpocket "Chou Ding" in Bai Di's novel has a personality similar to Ah Q. After winning the Malayan lottery, he is renamed "Brother Ah Ding". The care and preferential treatment he receives from people around him are highly reminiscent of "Brother Ah Q" when he gains various benefits. Such recurrence of Lu Xun's classic literary works is an important channel for the dissemination of Lu Xun's literary thoughts, and also indirectly reflects the wide reach of his ideas.

"With the generational evolution of Chinese society in Singapore and Malaysia, there have emerged varying degrees of acceptance, imitation, adaptation, and even meta-narrative, deconstruction and recreation of Lu Xun [2]." All these aspects constitute the dissemination of Lu Xun's classic works, academic thoughts, and the issues contained and expressed in his works in Southeast Asia. In the process of reference and learning, new vitality has been sparked, promoting cultural exchange, integration and development. In other words, Lu Xun's "spiritual victory method" and other related thoughts play an important role in studying important literary works of that era and reflecting the temporal characteristics of regional Chinese-language literature. Meanwhile, the "spiritual victory method" can be used as auxiliary material to connect itself with the era of the time, so as to construct a sound literary research system. It can also derive general discussions about literary works of the era from a macro perspective, exerting far-reaching influence on research in this field.

If we conduct in-depth research into why Southeast Asian Chinese-language writers learn from, draw on, imitate and write sequels to Lu Xun's classic works, we can identify three main reasons. First, the brilliance of Lu Xun's classic works is remarkable. Most of his works depict ordinary people without high status or powerful identities, so ordinary readers can easily resonate with them. This immediately highlights the value of Lu Xun's works and shows that they have a very wide audience. Second, the special international status of Southeast Asia. "Southeast Asian countries are situated in a diverse international cultural context [3]." Due to their geographical location, most Southeast Asian countries are close to the ocean with very convenient transportation. All countries in the region are in a highly diverse cultural environment, where Eastern and Western cultures collide with each other. This endows the region with greater inclusiveness, enabling more cultural exchange and integration, and bursting with vitality. Such an open and inclusive environment also provides a

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good venue for cultural exchange between China, which is geographically close to Southeast Asia, and the region. Therefore, the thoughts conveyed in Lu Xun's literary works can be disseminated relatively well and widely in such a place. Third, the historical background of Southeast Asia. Precisely because of its geographical location, Southeast Asia has received a large number of immigrants from other countries and regions, resulting in a lack of sense of national belonging. Most of Lu Xun's classic works are traditional yet national in nature. That is to say, they belong not only to a region, but also to an entire nation and the whole Chinese community. Such power can provide spiritual sustenance for overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia near China, help them preserve the essence of national culture and thought, and carry these cultures beyond national borders to the world. "The significance of Lu Xun's discovery lies in changing the academic circle's re-understanding of 'modern China' [4]." Therefore, Lu Xun's perspective extends not only within China but also overseas and to the whole world, with a broad global vision. Thus, the dissemination of his literature has its own purpose, serving as an active exploration of culture and the spread of national culture.

3. The "spiritual victory method" in Lu Xun's classics

Lu Xun's works have created many impressive characters, each with its own characteristics and style. But the most impressive one, and the most widely spread in Southeast Asia, is still "Ah Q". His spiritual victory method is a very unique form of self-encouragement with an extraordinary degree of optimism, leaving a deep impression on readers. As a very important aspect of Lu Xun's literary thoughts, studying the "spiritual victory method" is of great significance to the research of Lu Xun's literary works.

When creating the unique character Ah Q, Lu Xun explored how ordinary people with little power in that era could suppress their own pain through the spiritual victory method, and even transfer or eliminate their pain by this means. "Through the typical image of Ah Q, the chronic and widespread ills of national character are revealed [5]." Such a method can only be described as self-deception, convincing oneself that the pain does not exist. Therefore, from a realistic perspective, the pain never disappears and remains in the hearts of those people. "When creating *The True Story of Ah Q*, Lu Xun applied the theory of class [6]." Therefore, Mr. Lu Xun intended to use this method to remind people not to forget their pain. On the contrary, he even encouraged people to remember the pain, bravely feel it, restore their sense of pain, stop being as numb as before, and face themselves and the era bravely.

From the perspective of domestic research on the "spiritual victory method" in China, this concept actually has certain universality both at home and abroad. In Lu Xun's writing, he criticizes the deep-rooted defects of national character. "People of the middle and lower classes like Ah Q do not understand the meaning of revolution at all [7]." In the eyes of many literati at that time, they even thought that Ah Q, as depicted by Lu Xun, was scolding everyone living in that era. Many people were afraid to accept the image of Ah Q, considering him cowardly, like grass in all eras, trampled on at will and drifting with the wind. Even in that era, the discussion rose to the level of servility. "Lu Xun was not a forerunner leading the era; his basic understanding of 'slaves' was very close to that of Liang Qichao, Wu Rong and others [8]." Therefore, the "spiritual victory method", when elevated to the level of national character defects, was universal in China at that time. "The nihilist thought of characters in Lu Xun's works cannot be equated with Lu Xun's own nihilist thought [9]." Lu Xun's creative intention at that time is traceable: he used a positive attitude to satirize nihilist thought. In fact, Lu Xun himself did not fully expect that his classic works would have such great influence overseas. This classic work of Lu Xun has been continuously spread

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abroad, and has been translated into nearly 30 countries. Many overseas writers have said that in a certain period of their country's history, or even in the present period, there are many people who, like Ah Q, deceive themselves with the "spiritual victory method". Although the character Ah Q was created in China, his personality traits and inner thoughts resonate widely around the world. Many writers and philosophers have studied this psychological state. They believe that Ah Q's "spiritual victory method" is not a typical representation of a certain group, nor is it meant to reflect a single person or a certain type of people. Instead, it reflects a psychological state of human beings. Since this psychological state is individual and personality-based, it would be one-sided and biased to regard it merely as the behavior of a certain group of people.

"Its degree of generality transcends not only class and era, but also nationality and national borders [10]." Therefore, in Southeast Asia, with the dissemination of Lu Xun's classic literary works, the "spiritual victory method" has become an inevitable topic when people talk about Lu Xun. Many countries in Southeast Asia believe in Buddhism, and some take Buddhism as their state religion. Buddhist thought advocates suppressing and transferring one's own pain, which is partially similar to the connotation of the "spiritual victory method" mentioned above. This has cultivated among people the idea of transferring pain in the process of believing in Buddhism, and even a relatively cowardly mentality. They lack vigorous initiative, do not pursue their own desires, nor strive to create, but escape when encountering difficulties. The situation at that time was actually related to the era. After all, globalization had already taken a rough shape by then, and no country or region was an isolated entity. Lu Xun's works also provided writers in Southeast Asian countries with a clear idea: to awaken the people through words. This is also an important embodiment of the dissemination of the spiritual victory method in Southeast Asia. Obviously, this kind of awakening through words has certain value. Many people have come to understand Chinese culture through such writings, and through the thoughts behind the literature, a sense of cohesion and a kind of national "sense of pain" have emerged.

4. The dissemination of Lu Xun's national character thought in Southeast Asia

The powerful impact of Lu Xun's works in China is largely due to the fact that his thoughts were at the forefront of the era and he had his own understanding of the circumstances of the time. Among these thoughts, the core is the desire to awaken the numb people. The national character thought condensed in this process, carried in Lu Xun's literary works, spread to Southeast Asian countries and attracted the attention of Southeast Asian Chinese-language writers, some philosophers and even politicians. In Lu Xun's thought on national character, he holds that the biggest difference between humans and beasts lies in whether there is a sense of morality emanating from the bottom of one's heart. Moral concepts require long-term cultivation and are not innate. If one does not start with small things around them, even if human nature is inherently kind, one cannot understand all truths in the world, nor fully distinguish right from wrong in life. "Lu Xun seems to observe humanity from outside the human sphere [11]." From this perspective, Lu Xun seems to know better how to understand society and the people in it, find the weaknesses of human nature, and come up with more possibilities for them to live the life they desire. In his prose poem *The Repudiation of the Dog*, Mr. Lu Xun mentions that if dogs could speak, they would obtain more information in life and even promote communication, which would count as a great evolution. "The whole work reads like a fable. The sudden dialogue between a dog and a human is inherently highly absurd [12]." Humans evolved from ordinary animals to advanced animals because they have thoughts and can express them, and language is the main form of human expression. The spirit of self-reflection has become an important difference between humans and other animals. In human society, only a small number

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of thinkers and revolutionaries with advanced ideas can fully possess this ability of self-reflection. That is to say, this trait is lacking in a large proportion of people, which also summarizes part of the spiritual characteristics of most people. This work of Lu Xun "penetratingly reveals the social reality that snobbish people at that time were even inferior to dogs [13]." "A purely symbolist text actually presents realist 'images' [14]." Lu Xun constantly mentions the character traits of the people in his literary works. Through the interpretation of national character, common weaknesses of human nature can be identified more clearly. "If the tide of democratic thought develops without restriction into worship of 'rule by the majority', and people readily submit to majority rule, then the essence of autocracy remains unchanged [15]." This is the uniqueness of Lu Xun's thought compared with other prevalent thoughts of that period, and it has also enabled his views to spread to more parts of the world.

The "spiritual victory method" is an important argument of Lu Xun's thought on national character. Through this argument, we can see his thorough determination to criticize such defects of national character, and through this thought, he conveys his understanding of the social turmoil at that time. In the "spiritual victory method", the weakness of the people is brought to the forefront of the era. People at the bottom begin to realize that their own personality traits are being destroyed by the times, their autonomy is being lost, and their social status is being marginalized by the era. All these thoughts are closely related to the national character thought proposed by Lu Xun. The people's own "spiritual victory method" and Lu Xun's national character thought are mutually reinforcing, with a close relationship between the two. The thought of the "spiritual victory method" has become a substantial core, and this feature also promotes the worldwide dissemination of Lu Xun's national character thought.

5. Conclusion

"We must maintain a necessary tension between the author's intention, the text's intention and the reader's intention [16]." The author's thoughts, literary works and dissemination effects should be combined. "Lu Xun once said that *Wild Grass* was written for himself, and that his own philosophy was all contained in *Wild Grass* [17]." Therefore, when talking about Lu Xun's thoughts, one will inevitably mention *Wild Grass*. Many protagonists in Lu Xun's works are cowardly, but in fact, Lu Xun's *Wild Grass* is full of resistance to real life. "When writing this collection of prose poems, Lu Xun was in the hesitation and distress of searching for a new revolutionary path [18]." When creating this classic work, the social environment at that time and Lu Xun's own state of mind also provided a major driving factor for the work. "Because his body was fully respected, Lu Xun found a sense of unity of existence and the pleasure of unimpeded expression [19]." This spirit of resistance has become an important measure to impact traditional concepts and thoughts, with plot development full of strong emotions. "'Literary language' is a concept that is both perceptual and rational [20]." Therefore, in the creative process, Lu Xun actually balanced rationality and emotion, and had clear creative intentions. In research on *Wild Grass*, "the poetic features of *Wild Grass*, such as its connotation and style, all demonstrate the existence of its subjectivity [21]." For another example, Mr. Lu Xun's another novel *Regret for the Past* also has a very clear writing purpose, all of which are expressions of his thoughts. "Lu Xun's intention in writing *Regret for the Past* is clear and his goal is rational [22]." It is a subconscious ideological enlightenment given by Mr. Lu Xun to people, bringing deep shock to readers. For Southeast Asia, Chinese literature of this period also had a great influence. "Southeast Asian Chinese-language literature naturally cannot abandon the 'Chinese literary tradition' that has developed since the Pre-Qin period [23]." However, most parts of Southeast Asia were under colonial rule during this period, and there was an urgent need for a strong

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national character thought to awaken the people. "On the major issue of how to view national character, the views of Lu Xun and Nanyang writers are worthy of comparative analysis [24]." As can be seen from the Southeast Asian Chinese-language literary works related to Ah Q's "spiritual victory method" mentioned above, some Southeast Asian Chinese-language writers express similar implications implicitly through special writing techniques. In the later period of that era, the masses in Southeast Asia "no longer stayed with the words in newspapers and magazines, but brought Lu Xun onto the streets [25]." Even after that period, Lu Xun's thoughts still have great influence in Southeast Asia in modern times, inspiring the people. "The selection of Lu Xun's works in Singapore's textbooks, based on the actual situation of students, well embodies the educational concepts of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude and proceeding step by step [26]." This is a manifestation of advancing with the times. To carry forward Lu Xun's spirit, Southeast Asia also often conducts research on Lu Xun's works, and "this research motivation has now become a tradition in Lu Xun studies [27]."

Through the study of Lu Xun's classic works and the works created by some Southeast Asian Chinese-language writers, we can conclude that "Lu Xun's literary criticism indeed awakened a large number of patriotic revolutionaries and led to the most revolutionary and intense literary transformation [28]." This is of great significance and value not only to the overseas dissemination of Lu Xun's works, but also to the research on the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature.

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