

Balzac's Realist Literary Views Reflected and Embodied in Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q*

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Abstract. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Eastern and Western literature began to gradually converge. Western realist literary theories from the 19th-century European realist movement, represented by Balzac, had a profound impact on modern Chinese literature. This influence is especially evident in the creation of novels. *The True Story of Ah Q* is a notable example of this influence. This study mainly focuses on exploring the spirit of realism and the typical meaning of Q and other typical literary images in *The True Story of Ah Q*, i.e. selecting the two most representative ideas in Balzac's realism theory and analysing their realistic reflection in *The True Story of Ah Q* about the content of specific works. It is found that some of the core concepts of Balzac's realist literary theory are exhibited in Mr. Lu Xun's masterpiece, *The True Story of Ah Q*.

1 Introduction

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the invasion of the Western powers completely broke the long-standing closed state of traditional Chinese society, and the Chinese nation was faced with a national crisis of unprecedented severity. New things and new concepts from the West were introduced into China and significantly impacted Chinese society at the point of change between the old and the new, bringing a profound influence on the transmutation of traditional society. Traditional Chinese literature has also been gradually transformed into modern Chinese literature under the influence of Western literature to a certain extent.

With the deepening of the New Culture Movement in China, the advanced intellectuals represented by Lu Xun began to reflect on traditional literature, taking anti-traditionalism, individual emancipation and enlightenment as their aims, focusing their attention on Western literature, paying attention to foreign literary movements and trends, and drawing on foreign literary experience. The literary revolution they advocated and the discussion on building new literature was also directly based on the 19th century-Western literary trends and theories. The realist literary trends and theories that emerged and became popular in 19th-century Europe, alongside the rapid development of capitalism, had a profound impact on Chinese society at that time [1].

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Balzac is a great representative of 19th-century realist literature, and his literary propositions have considerable significance as a guide and reference for realist creation in modern Chinese literature [2]. Lu Xun was a pioneer of Chinese realist literature. He consciously used and drew on Western literary theories in his novel creation. Lu Xun shaped great literary archetypes and showed deep concern for social reality and human nature. His profound realism significantly contributed to the development and maturity of modern Chinese literature.

This paper focuses on the traces of Balzac's realism in Mr Lu Xun's representative work of fiction, *The True Story of Ah Q*. It focuses on the influence of Western literature on the transformation and development of Chinese literature. It focuses on the influence of Western literature on the transformation and development of Chinese literature, which is of enduring significance and value to the exploration of the development of our national literature and its life trajectory.

2 The spirit of realistic creation and creative principles shown in *The True Story of Ah Q*

The portrayal of typical characters in typical environments is the basic artistic requirement of traditional realist creation. Along with the realist literary movement that emerged in the 19th century in Britain, France, Russia and other major western countries, which was mainly characterised by the portrayal of real life and the real world, realist literary creation was pushed to the peak, and a large number of classic realist literary works and literary theories emerged. Balzac, the great representative of French realist literature, made great contributions to the further development of realist literary theory while engaging in literary creation. Balzac consciously distilled and summarised his own literary ideas and theories, which had a profound influence on the realist literature of modern Chinese society, while gathering and displaying the spirit of realism in his works. In literary creation, Balzac believed that literature should truly reflect and depict life, record the real social landscape as well as people's real living conditions, and write about life as it is. "The mission of literature is to depict society", and creation should start from reality [3]. He believes that, in order to depict reality in detail, literary works must observe life in detail, start from observing real life, pay attention to the details of the carving and depiction, and on this basis, show the restoration of life itself [4].

Along with the "realistic literature" brought about by the Literary Revolution and the requirements of ideological enlightenment, Lu Xun, with the rational spirit of ideological enlightenment, penetrated the rural society at the bottom of Chinese society and observed in detail the real state of life of the people at the bottom of the society who were struggling to survive. He profoundly revealed and expressed all the details of their miserable lives in his works. In the work, the details of their miserable lives are deeply revealed and expressed. Literary works imbued with the spirit of realism and humanitarian concern often have a deeper artistic impact. Lu Xun's grasp of realism is not confined to the level of imitating the real world and human life. On top of this level, he endeavored to explore the spiritual poison of the traditional feudal rites that had lasted for thousands of years on the peasants behind the surface of their miserable lives, and even on the society as a whole, and unreservedly and with great irony exposed their stupid, arrogant and insensitive state of mind and spiritual world in his works. The intertwining of the poverty of material life and the barrenness of spiritual life jointly caused the tragedy of their fate and personality. This process is also accompanied by Lu Xun's personal experience of growing up and life experience, which makes it more and more profound and heavy.

In the novel *The True Story of Ah Q*, Lu Xun's description of Ah Q's appearance, living environment and living conditions in the opening chapter is not only a background

explanation of Ah Q's character and a series of events surrounding Ah Q, but also a true reproduction of the times and rural social ecology of that time in a more macroscopic sense. "Q has no home" and can only use the Tugu Shrine in Weizhuang as his shelter, and at the same time, he "has no fixed occupation", and he wears only a ragged jacket, etc., which shows that he is facing great difficulties in individual survival. The lack of satisfaction with his basic survival needs for a long time makes him develop a lazy and complacent personality and vices. The rendering of Q's living environment and the portrayal of his language and demeanour in the text are a true portrayal of his extremely poor life [5]. It is also a deep reflection of the real state of the late Qing Dynasty when the feudal society was in pieces, and the people at the bottom of the society were struggling for survival. Q's psychological activities and personality consciousness also have a lot in common with the vast majority of people living in the poor countryside. They are conservative, backward, numb and ignorant, like to bully the weak and deceive themselves and others, but also succumb to reality and degrade themselves, and do not seek liberation and seek advanced aspirations and consciousness, and at the same time do not have the ability of self-liberation. Q lacks the basic sense of equality and self-consciousness. In his view, he is not a completely independent personality and thinking consciousness of the human being, but more like a parasitic in the feudal hierarchy under the layers of exploitation of an object. He does not have the basic conditions of becoming a person. Because of the long-term spiritual oppression and personality under the shackles of the state of life, he did not feel that everything around him exists in the irrationality of the situation. In the face of many contradictions contrary to the demands of his humanity, he also lost the sense of resistance, or rather, he can only use his own "law of spiritual victory" to do silent resistance to the things around him. "law of spiritual victory" has become his main characteristic, relying on the law of spiritual victory to explain all phenomena, and seeking to explain all the phenomena. He relies on spiritual victory to explain all phenomena and seeks unrealistic self-satisfaction and a sense of superiority over others [6]. In the chapter "No Revolution", Q's perception of the revolution is full of ignorance, violence and savagery, which is a true display of the primitive vengeance of the peasants at the bottom of the Chinese feudal society. From this point of view, the spirit of Q is also poor and deprived. As a matter of fact, what is gathered in Q is the cognitive consensus of the majority of peasants at that time, and it is a reflection of the reality of society with universal meaning.

From a more macroscopic perspective, the small village of Weizhuang reflects a huge rural society under the oppression of harsh and cruel feudal rule. People living here come from different classes, with different social identities, class consciousness and cultural and psychological identities. There are the family of Zhao Taifa, who symbolises the feudal landlord class in the old society, and there are also poor peasants such as Ah Q and Xiao D, who earn their living by doing odd jobs for other people, as well as various characters such as the fake foreign devils, Wang Hu, and Wu Ma, etc. The people living in the same living environment have different social identities and cultural psychological identities. People live in the same living environment, but there is such a big gap in the material standard of living. The concept of hierarchy and the sense of unequal personalities on the basis of the feudal economy are deeply rooted in the psyche of every human being. It must be realised that in such a social environment, in fact, a feudal autocratic society with unequal and exploitative power rule as the underlying logic, it is impossible for poor people to find a way out. Not only in terms of solving the problem of basic food and clothing and compensating for the material level of life, but also in terms of thinking and spirituality. They are faced with a series of major problems such as the inability to unleash their free individuality and the difficulty of forming an independent personality. This also reflects that at the time of the great national crisis, the Chinese society, from the upper level of Manchu feudal rulers to the lower level of the top to the bottom of the state of ignorance, numbness and self-deception,

all the feudal rulers of the internal brutal oppression, the external slavery of the ugly face of compromise.

Besides, there is a scene and plot of special significance in the novel that deserves attention. In the chapter "No Revolution", the typical character of AQ is nested into the historical background of the Xinhai Revolution. The insertion of real historical events can be said to have strengthened the expression of realism to a certain extent, which makes the rendering of the artistically processed fictional characters and scenes more natural and real. Its realism and spiritual temperament and the literary demand for enlightenment are also more prominent [6]. Spiritual temperament and the literary demand for ideological enlightenment are also more prominent [6]. AQ and the backward peasant group he represented exposed their numb and ignorant nature more and more profoundly in the historical changes of the Xinhai Revolution. They did not understand revolution, and the revolution of the emerging bourgeoisie seemed to them to be no different from the traditional peasant revolution, which was all about realising one's leap through overthrow and subversion and making the private property and land of the landlord class one's own. This phenomenon profoundly reflected the nature of the Xinhai Revolution and its impact at that time from the side. Accordingly, it can be seen that the revolution did not touch the underlying logic of feudal social rites and hierarchical ideological concepts from the root. It also did not liberate the masses of poor peasants from material deprivation, and ideological and spiritual oppression and make them become complete and independent human beings in the true sense of the word. It was destined to be unsuccessful if it merely overthrew the feudal system without an in-depth ideological revolution. The final scene of Q facing death on the execution ground is not only a metaphor for the coming of the revolutionary era, but also a strong demand of the peasant class to get rid of the survival difficulties and oppressed status in the cultural and ideological struggles [7]. The silent "spectators" beside Q are even more silent people who have lost their souls under feudal exploitation and oppression. They don't know why they go to "see", nor do they know what to "see", but just go along to "see". The "spectators" who have lost their thoughts and sense of independence are the real-life prototypes of the broadest masses of the underclass in feudal society.

3 The display of the creative principle of "typicalism" in novels

"To make a work compelling, artists should use their talent to portray typical characters" [3]. Shaping typical characters in typical environments is another requirement of traditional realist creation. Balzac put forward the creative requirements of artistic typical creation, through the activities of typical characters to truly reflect the reality of life, which is the realist literature, "typical theory" of the creative principles. This is the principle of "typicalism" in realist literature. In this respect, it is enough to show Balzac's consistent spirit of realism in the practice of literary creation. Balzac's understanding and reconstruction of the meaning of artistic "typicality" is not limited to purely reflecting or imitating the whole of real life, but rather, based on selecting the details of life and processing them artistically. It should be refined and generalised to create a typical image with a distinctive mark of individuality, which is to grasp and display the differences in human nature through appropriate fiction. It is through appropriate fiction to grasp and display the differences of human nature, so that the literary typical in the text of the more dynamic vitality [4]. Balzac also stressed that "the typical is a sample of the class", the typical character has its representative of a particular social group of certain characteristics, that is, the extension of the universal representation of the typical character [8]. In the specific creative practice, Balzac also attaches great importance to the grasp of the "typical environment". Literary works of characters in the era and the environment in which they live, should be a microcosm of the times. The typical environment from a certain point of view can reflect an era of social development and the

evolution of the general outlook [4]. The typical environment also plays a significant role in shaping a person's character in the process of growth and development, discovering and explaining the deep-rooted social reasons behind the characters' behaviours and events in the environment, and analysing the characters' ideological changes as well as the inevitability of their destinies from the height of social and historical development. "Typical character" or "artistic typical", under the creation conditions of fixed text, should be shaped as an artistic entity organically united with universality and particularity, commonality and individuality through certain artistic processing, to achieve full exposure of itself in a typical environment, and to show its full potential. The "Art Typical", under the conditions of the creation of fixed texts, should be shaped as an artistic entity with the organic unity of universality and particularity, commonality and individuality through certain artistic processing, to achieve the full exposure of itself in the typical environment, and to manifest the realism mission of "true imitation of nature".

The greatest representative significance of Mr. Lu Xun's AQ, as one of the famous literary archetypes all over the world, lies in the fact that AQ is the centralised embodiment of China's national weaknesses [6]. People's criticism of the characterisation of Ah Q has been changing with the times. At first, in the Enlightenment trend of the 1920s and the national salvation trend of the 1930s, along with the requirements of national self-criticism and enlightenment, Q was more often used as the "silent soul of the nation" to realise the demand of the intellectuals of the May Fourth New Culture for the enlightenment of the general public. In the 1950s and 1970s after the founding of New China, however, literature was more often used as a tool of political propaganda to achieve political goals in a larger sense. With the shift in the positioning of literature, reflecting class struggle became the primary task of literary creation and even literary text analysis. The class analysis of literary works was emphasised, and Q was regarded as a typical representative of the "backward peasants" and a typical "rebel", whose heart was mixed with the primitive vengeance of the peasants in the depths of human nature, which can be clearly shown in Q's perception of the revolution. This typical significance can be demonstrated from AQ's perception of revolution [9]. He did not know what a revolution was but only knew that it was an opportunity for him to become the master of his own house. He unrealistically fantasised that after he became the master of his own house, he would use all means to take revenge on those who oppressed and despised him, such as Zhao Laotai, Wang Hu, the fake foreign devils, and so forth. He would also realise his narrow-minded aim of appropriating the landlord's private property for himself, at any cost. Undoubtedly, this is essentially the revolutionary ideology of the peasant class, with class limitations that cannot be ignored. After the reform and opening up, along with the change of the reality of ideological emancipation, people interpreted the character of Ah Q from a new angle, i.e. Ah Q was considered as a concentration of "national weaknesses" and a mirror of "anti-feudal ideological revolution", in order to echo the new demands of the new period the new demands of ideological emancipation. The character of Ah Q was interpreted more as a concentrated display of "national weaknesses", as a mirror of the "anti-feudal ideological revolution", which echoed the new demands of ideological emancipation in the new period [9]. The cultural category and spiritual meaning carried by Ah Q is the "servility" and "inferiority" of the Chinese nation, which have been produced in the souls of the people for thousands of years under the oppression of feudal despotism and traditional ritualism. This is not only the key to the weakness of the national character, but also the external manifestation of a distorted and alienated "personality", which is the product of the feudal hierarchical order, and hierarchical concepts shaped over a long period of time. Surviving and living in such an environment for a long period, with extreme material poverty and multiple spiritual oppressions, is contrary to the inherent human aspirations of Q as a living individual. This sealed Q's inevitable tragic fate. The whole Weizhuang is the symbol and epitome of the feudal hierarchical society, in which everyone strictly follows and abides by

the concept of hierarchy in thinking and acting. Weizhuang is not only the background and stage of the whole novel, but also a reproduction of the ideal so-called "typical environment" mentioned by Balzac. Here a series of characters are presented and unfolded, making the characters reflect the true reality of the historical background without losing flesh and blood, three-dimensionality and vividness. As the core character and "typical character", Q himself is a poor peasant with no support and a miserable life from the point of view of class status, representing the vast underclass of people who are oppressed and exploited under the long-term rule of the feudal society, and he is an individual among the oppressed and exploited masses of working people. The Confucian concept of rites and rituals suppresses human sexual desire and individual freedom. This suppression conflicts with basic human nature, especially under long-term authoritarian rule. People at the bottom of the social hierarchy, like Ah Q, suffer poor lives and numbness. Their hierarchical consciousness prevents them from escaping their predicament. This is the fundamental reason for their suffering [6]. Q, as an independent individual, in a specific environment, in the course of his life growth, is also bound to face such as basic survival needs cannot be met such as "the distress of life", "sexual longing", the "fear of death" and so on. Almost everyone will encounter many real-life difficulties in life. "Fear of death" and many other real-life dilemmas that everyone encounters. In recent years, from a broader perspective, such as the "existentialism" perspective on the character of Q "typical" meaning of interpretation and discovery, are also proving that Q's "typical" significance [9]. The most praiseworthy "Spiritual Victory" in the whole novel is the main characteristic of Q as his ideological weapon [6]. The "Spiritual Victory Method" is a powerful confirmation of the high degree of unity of Q's commonality and individuality, and the exposure of Q's "Spiritual Victory Method" realises the perfect sublimation of the interpretation of the typical significance of a typical image, and better embodies the typical significance of the "weakness of the national nature" carried by him. This is also a new interpretation of the connotation of the typical image of Q in recent years. Born under the feudal ritual order and hierarchical relationship, the Law of Spiritual Victory always sets out to maintain the so-called empty "face" and fails to confirm its value of life from the perspective of self-development. It is more like a highly generalised and critical view of the face-saving, self-disparaging and self-deluding servile nature of the Chinese people over the past thousands of years. This is more like a summary and criticism of the slavish nature of Chinese people, who have been good at saving face, belittling themselves and deceiving themselves and others for thousands of years, and who, after failing in their struggles and rebellions, have completely lost their spiritual weaknesses and are contented with self-congratulation. From this side, Q has the shadow of every Chinese person, every Chinese person has a Q in his heart, and the "method of spiritual victory" has become a synonym with both historical and practical significance. From the point of view of the "typical character", the reason for the enduring and everlasting great work "The True Story of Ah Q" is more reflected in the novel's profound revelation and criticism of real human nature, especially the dark, weak and conceited side of human nature. While criticising, Lu Xun has more sympathy and concern for the choices and destinies of these unfortunate little people. The restoration of human nature provides a warning and inspiration for the survival of the individual and the construction of a democratic system [10].

4 Conclusion

To sum up, this study finds that some of the important views and contents of Balzac's realist literary theories are significantly shown and reflected in Mr. Lu Xun's novel *The True Story of Ah Q*. When Mr Lu Xun conceived and created *The True Story of Ah Q*, he always carried out the realist literary requirement of "for the sake of life", responded to the creative pursuit and artistic spirit of realist literature of realist imitation of life, and showed Mr. Lu Xun's

meticulous observation and profound grasp of the details of the social life of the era in which he lived, and it also reflected the strong sense of social responsibility and saturation of Mr Lu Xun's body. It also reflects Mr Lu Xun's strong sense of social responsibility and the spirit of humanitarian realism, which is full of humanistic concern and ideological enlightenment. Mr Lu Xun's artistic portrayal of the typical character of Ah Q is also very successful. As the image of Q and the countless spectators behind Q, as well as the dying feudal hierarchical society represented by the typical environment of Weizhuang, the whole novel, is artfully kneaded together, becoming a bright light in world literature. However, this study is still insufficient. The selected angles of analysis are not rich enough, and the analyses of the selected parts are not sufficient and comprehensive. It is hoped that scholars engaged in this field will pay more attention to the interconnection and mutual influence between Chinese and Western literature in the future, so as to make up for the shortcomings of this comparative literature study.

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