

The gains and losses of erotica depiction in modern Chinese literature

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Abstract: Mencius said, 'Appetite and lust are only natural.' Various feelings and desires are inherent in human beings. As the physiological function and physiological needs of human beings, sex is one of the most important components of personal and social life. Literature is "human studies". Erotica depiction is inevitable in literature, even in some cases, "sex" has become a significant part of literary description. However, in the traditional Chinese literature and society, "sex" and "morality" have become the contrary, and people tend to be cautious in describing "sex" in literature with a high sense of social responsibility and enthusiasm of feudal morality.

1. Introduction

In the long history of China's civilization development, the feudal society has occupied more than two thousand years. The feudal ethics of "three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues" "dominated" people's mind. Under the guiding ideology of pursuing harmony and unity, the unique term called "sexual morality" was created where originally "sex" and "morality" are totally irrelevant.

Sexual morality has always been in accordance with and the values of ancient Chinese society. On the way of sex constructing, the Chinese ancients kept struggling for a long time in the endless darkness. Although the calls of ancient Chinese literati were unfortunately obliterated, luckily, the voice of their shouting was not flooded by the "positive sound" of the times. "The Dream of Red Mansions" is a glimpse of it.

From ancient times, feudal ethics has regulated people: gender relations must be loyal, and do not prematurely encounter sexual life, which are manifested in many statutes, such as: "be loyal to one's spouse unto death", "exterminating the desire", "It is improper for men and women to touch each other's hand in passing objects" and etc^[1]. The traditional society advocates "propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame", while erotica depiction unfortunately was against it and "discussing sex is awkward". People are ashamed of talking about "sex", so that for today's China, the history of sex education is still a blank, and the sexual concept of the Chinese people has long been banned.

2. "Propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame" results in sexual abandon

From the "propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame" of feudal ethics, we can clearly tell that it has the rationality of ethics and morality, but also has negative side effects of ethics and morality.

The rationality of "propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame" advocated by feudal ethics lies in that, subjectively speaking, this moral norm is to maintain the ethical order of the whole society, resolve social contradictions, ensure the purity of patriarchal clan blood and safeguard the family's interests, so as to maintain the long-term governance of the society^[2]. It may be the potential reason to explain why the feudal ethics emphasizes "propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame", and even raises it to the status of law - "combination of law and etiquette", in order to achieve the goal of eternal protection of the kingdom.

However, the voice of The Times and society calling for "propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame" seems too powerful, leading to exposure of the criticism of lacking of "propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame" in that era – sexual abandon.

This criticism was evidenced by “The Dream of Red Mansions”. <Chia Pao-yue's reaps his first experience in licentious love, Grandma Liu's first visit to the Jung Kuo Mansion>: Pao-yue had his first love, “he forthwith expounded to Hsi Jen all the mysteries he had been taught by the Fairy in the dream”; <In the vehemence of her feelings, Hua (Hsi Jen) on a quiet evening admonishes Pao-yue - While (the spell) of affection continues unbroken, Pao-yue, on a still day, perceives the fragrance emitted from Tai-yu’s person>: Ming Yan holding down a girl and likewise “indulging in what the Monitory Dream Fairy had taught him” without asking her age; again <Chia Pao-yue's reaps his first experience in licentious love, Grandma Liu's first visit to the Jung Kuo Mansion>: Chiao Ta, who seemed to be crazy, laid bare the secret of his remark, reflecting the shadow of the society under that era - “day after day indulging in obscene and incestuous practice, ‘in scraping of the ashes’ and in philandering with brothers-in-law”. Human relations was trampled down - Lady Feng was however intent upon gently sipping her tea, and after a good long while of Abstraction, she at last smiled: “Never mind, “ she remarked; “you can go. But come after you’ve had your evening meal, and I’ll then tell you about it. Just now there are visitors here; and besides, I don't fell in the humour^[3]”. “ Chia Jung smiled willfully and thereupon retired with gentle step.

“A dream of red mansions” does not explicitly tell readers about the sexual abandon. Instead, it let its readers feel its existence from time to time, and let the reader unambiguously realize the “incurable disease”, which was terrible venereal disease due to sexual abandon, that is, the latent social crisis caused by incest relations.

3. “Propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame” results in absence of sex

The harmfulness of “propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame” in feudal ethics is that, objectively speaking, the moral norms of “propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame” appear as law, that is, “combination of law and etiquette”, forcing people to give up their pursuit of their beautiful aspiration and neglect the development of individuality, even distort humanity. In particular, marriage has no freedom, and instead advocating “arrange a match by parents’ order and on the matchmaker’s word”.

Western believes that the primary purpose of marriage is sex. It respects the will of both parties and focuses on the orientation of spiritual values. As Paz said: “Lovers love the body and the soul equally. It can even be said that if it is not because of physical attraction, the loved one will not be able to love the soul that makes the body alive.” However, the ancient Chinese concept of marriage was that marriage is reproduction and continuation of the family line^[4]. “Book of Rites. Marriage has a saying: the marriage should be best combination of two families, on the basis of both worship of ancestors and reproduction. For the guidelines - “arrange a match by parents’ order and on the matchmaker’s word”, it ignores the will of both parties and focuses the material value orientation. This value orientation directly leads to the absence of personal sexuality, boiling over into a series of tragedies.

In “A dream of red mansions”, the author set up many scenes and situations of “sexual absence”: Chia Pao-yue was unable to independently decide his own marriage, watching his beloved Lin Tai-yue leaving him, being forced or even tricked to marrying Pao-ch’ai, who is in good health; <Hsueeh P’an regrets marrying Xia Jingui, Ying ch’un married a bad man in Zhongshan by mistake> mentioned that Ying ch’un married Sun Shaozu by mistake; <His Majesty shows magnanimous bounty. The Imperial consort Yuan pays a visit to her parents. The happiness of a family gathering. Pao-yue displays his polished talents> also mentioned that Imperial consort Yuan, who was favour by the emperor, paid a visit to her parents but cried that she was sent to somewhere shady.

Tragic characters have their own misfortunes, but the tragedies of Pao-yue, Ying ch’un, Yuan ch’un and others all stem from the sorrow of sex absence. This is entirely for the purpose of safeguarding the interests of the Chia Family Group. Everything is for the “worship of ancestors and reproduction.” Marriage is the bond of maintaining interests, so its destruction and self-extinguishing are unstoppable.

Therefore, it cannot be avoided that Pao-yue would ran away, although what was waiting for him

would be endless suffering. He would never bear the tremendous pain brought to him by “sex absence”. At the same time, his departure, after he successfully zhong-ju (passing the provincial civil service examination under the old Chinese examination system), just like putting out fire from a pot of boiling water, after boiling, after all, it was only silent, and like a ballast column tumbled down. When Chia Pao-yue, who is the symbol of the soul and spirit of the family Chia, defected the family, it is undoubtedly a declaration of the true demise of the family Chia. The source of the power of Pao-yue’s “defection” is the absence of sex. Pao-yue eventually lost his soul mate and freed himself from the world and converted to “purity”.

The author expressed the feudal ethics of the so-called “propriety, righteousness, honesty and the sense of shame” exactly through this series of tragedies of “sex absence”, trying to ruthlessly whip, resist, and alert the world.

Reviewing ancient Chinese literatures, we can faintly hear the ancient people’s silent lament about “sex”, which were a powerful protest against “sex absence”, indicating that people do have a strong desire for true love and soul mate.

References

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