Research on Anti-war Consciousness in Akira Yoshimura's "Shipwrecks"

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Keywords: Akira Yoshimura, war experience, Shipwrecks, ship god, war consciousness.

Abstract: Akira Yoshimura created a series of "cruise" novels based on the records of drifters overseas during the Edo period. In the work "Shipwrecks", Yoshimura uses the "fishing village" and the "Ship God" as metaphors for Japan and what happened to Japan during World War II. He tries to propose the view of good and evil, and warns readers to create life with labor.

1. Introduction

Contemporary Japanese writer Akira Yoshimura (1927-2009) was born in Nippori, Tokyo. In June 1958, Yoshimura entered the Japanese literary world with his novel "Mikkai". Akira Yoshimura is known for his historical novels and probationary literature (literature based on a large number of field investigations). His masterpiece "Senkan Musashi" won the 21st Kikuchi Kan Award, and his novel "Hagoku" won the 1985 Yomiuri Literature Award. The story "Shipwrecks" was created in 1980, formerly known as "Oceanic Current", serialized in "Chikuma" in 1980, and published by Chikuma Study in May 1982. It was Akira Yoshimura's second full-length marine history novel after "Hyouryuu". The novel is based on an unnamed small fishing village on an outlying island. Based on the third-person perspective, the novel tells the story of this poor small fishing village with only 17 households, which was temporarily prosperous because of the "Ship God", and then collapsed because of the "Ship God". The "Ship God" in the novel is different from the "Sea God" in the traditional customs of Japan's coastal areas who hopes for a good harvest, but means plundering and killing instead. The author uses his usual calm tone to describe the ordinary poor life of the villagers in the fishing village and the ups and downs surrounding the "Ship God", showing an intriguing picture of people facing the test of survival in adversity, which arouses endless aftertastes and reflection from readers. In the novel, the prosperity and decline of small fishing villages, and the retribution of villagers after committing crimes, are vividly on the paper. It is not difficult to feel that Akira Yoshimura uses novels to warn and exhort people to obtain life through their own hands, not to covet external temptations, and not to exchange other people's lives for their own stable creative intentions.

At present, the research on Yoshimura Akira's "Shipwrecks" is still relatively blank at home and abroad. "Shipwrecks" is a representative work of Akira Yoshimura's early "Crafts" literature. Its creative intention, the character of the protagonist, and the social significance of the work are all worthy of discussion. The author intends to take the work of "Shipwrecks" as the research object, use text analysis method to analyze the characters, social background, story development and other elements of the work, and deeply dig the author's writing intention, in order to further enrich the connotation of Yoshimura Akira's marine literature, and make a small contribution for the construction of Japanese marine literature research system.

2. Summary of the works

The male protagonist, Isaku, was a diligent and responsible boy. Although his parents were diligent and capable, the fishing village was so poor that it was difficult for a family of six to make a living. His father can only go to a remote port to do physical work. Although the eldest son Isaku was thin and his fishing skills were still unfamiliar, he still worked very hard and go out to sea to...
fish for food every day to support his younger brothers and sisters.

Just like the villagers, after receiving the gift from the "Ship God" for the first time, Isaku was very excited to think that these materials were the treasures that God couldn't bear. When the "Ship God" came for the second time, Isaku and the ignorant and greedy villagers had no doubts about the drifting boat full of red-clothed corpses. Virus red clothes. As a result, every household was infected with the pox virus. Fortunately, the industrious Isaku insisted on going out to the sea to fish every day, and was lucky not to be infected with the pox virus. The helpless villagers could only send their relatives who are infected with the virus into the mountains and let them fend for themselves. The grief-stricken Isaku found himself in a tragic situation where his family was destroyed.

3. Analysis of Works

3.1. Fishing Villages - Desolate Badlands

The southern side of the fishing village was blocked by a protruding headland. If you wanted to go to other villages, you could only climb over the mountains to the north. There were two deep valleys on the mountain, and to climb to the top, you need to pass through a steep, vine-covered forest.

There were only 17 households in the small fishing village, which was located on the isolated coast, as if it would be swallowed up by the rolling waves at any time. With such a dangerous, closed and harsh living environment, the villagers living in the remote, barren and backward small fishing villages can only rely on the traditional fishing industry to make ends meet, and they have to pin their hopes of survival on the "Ship God", who constantly pray for the God brings good luck - food and supplies.

3.2. The Desert Island - the Epitome of Japan

Sado Island (now Sado City, Niigata Prefecture) is 25 miles away from the port of Niigata Prefecture. The terrain is high in the northeast and low in the southwest. From west to east, there are the Osado Mountains, the Middle Plains and the Kosado Mountains. Since the Edo Shogunate period, it has been a sinister place for exiles. It has a unique "refugee culture". In the novel, the geographical location of the fishing village is basically consistent with the geographical conditions of "high in the middle and low on both sides" of the Osado Mountains of Sado Island. Sado Island is very similar to the Japanese island in terms of geographical location, topographical characteristics and cultural characteristics. The author consulted the relevant research materials on Sado Island and found that "Sado is the abbreviation of Japan" [Oba Osamu, Higaki Tomoe, Miyashita Hiroshi. A HISTORICAL STUDY OF TOWNHOUSES ON THE SADO ISLAND.:Jusoken,2014.23-34.] At the same time, the descriptions of the fishing villages, such as poor land, few types of crops, lack of materials, and living resources mainly relying on foreign transactions, are similar to the current situation of low social productivity in Japan during the war. In the novel, the closed fishing village has always retained the custom of the original "Ship God". According to the data, since the Edo period in Japan, due to the low level of medical care, people suffering from acne have not been treated in time, and they can only wear red clothes to ward off evil spirits and are forced to drift on the sea by boat, seeking God’s rescue. It can be seen that in the early stage of his creation, based on a large number of field investigations, Yoshimura found that Sado Island is very similar to Japan Island, and adopted the writing technique of "learning from history", and implicitly gave Sado Island a special symbolic meaning in his creation.

3.3. "Ship God" - a Metaphor of War

The "Ship God" brought two diametrically opposite results, "hope" and "destruction" to the fishing village, which was very similar to what happened to Japan in World War II. In the early days of the war, Japan seized a large number of materials from China and other places. In the later period of the war, it suffered devastating blows such as the atomic bombing and Tokyo bombing. In the work, some villagers collectively snatch the wrecked ship "Ship God", which is the author's obscure
description of Japan's foreign aggression.

4. Creation Background

4.1. Yoshimura Akira's War Experience

At the end of World War II, Japanese society was in chaos. After the death of his elder brother Keigo in 1944, 17-year-old Yoshimura was forced to work in a munitions factory in response to the Japanese government's apprenticeship order. Unfortunately, he suffered from pleurisy and tuberculosis, and his mother died during convalescence. In his essay, he wrote: I have witnessed the tragic state of refugees who had been blown up by artillery shells and had no way to escape but had to hide in their own cemetery. "[Yoshimura Akira. My Literary Drift[M].Chikumashobo:,2009:16.].

After the war, his father died of cancer, and Yoshimura was unable to go to school because of the war, and his studies were stagnant. As a witness to the Tokyo air raid and one of the victims of the war, Akira Yoshimura suffered irreparable trauma to both his mind and body.

After entering middle age, the folk historian Akira Yoshimura wrote a large number of historical novels based on the Japanese Shipwrecks in the Edo period, such as "Hyouryuu", "Shipwrecks" and "Syunomaru Goyosen". "Shipwrecks" and "Syunomaru Goyosen" are both novels with the theme of the aborigines snatching supplies from the wrecked ship. In "Shipwrecks", the behavior of the villagers to snatch the "Ship God" is essentially an extremely selfish and cruel robbery behavior. Yoshimura adopted the method of satirizing the past with the present, using the fishing village to allude to Japan, and satirizing the Japanese aggression with the ancient cruel custom of "Ship God", and put forward the view of reincarnation of good and evil. Through the protagonist Isaku, Yoshimura takes the villagers from full of anticipation, to the tragic experience of being frightened and tortured, infected with the plague and paying the price of their lives, and warns readers not to repeat the same mistakes, reflecting Yoshimura Akira's strong anti-war awareness.

4.2. Difficult Times with Frequent Shipwrecks

Although it did not mention a specific time background in "Shipwrecks", it can still be inferred from the fact that the people infected with chickenpox have not been effectively treated in the plot. Yoshimura Akira's work "Hyouryuu" tells the story of Nagahei's shipwreck and drifting to an uninhabited island. In the history of Japan, the Edo period was an era when there were many shipwrecks. When the ship was wrecked, the crew would row to the nearby shore for help. In the work, in order to evade the government's investigation, the villagers only snatch private merchant ships, and dare not covet the vassal ships sheltered by the shogunate. Coincidentally, 17 years later, Yoshimura Akira's work "Shunomaru Goyosen" tells the story of a fisherman who discovered the wrecked vassal ship and stole the supplies on board with the local residents and suffered severe punishment. Yoshimura narrates stories such as "Hyouryuu", "Shipwrecks" and "Shunomaru Goyosen " from the perspectives of sailors and the aboriginal people of the drifting place. Among them, "Shipwrecks" and "Shunomaru Goyosen" are both novels about the aborigines robbing the wrecked ship's supplies. Although the ownership of the wrecked ship is different, the fate of the aborigines in the two works is the same. It is precisely because medical care and supplies cannot be widely circulated under the lock-down policy, and the moral standards in remote areas are not high, that leads them to take the road of sneaky and violent plunder. But even if he is lucky enough to escape the government's investigation, this kind of selfishness and greed will eventually be eaten back on themselves.

4.3. The War Metaphor of "Ship God"

The "Ship God" in the work is essentially a plunder of other people's property. Akira Yoshimura uses his usual calm and objective style to remind readers that even if life is poor, one must rely on his own hands to realize his creative intention. In World War II, Japan's foreign aggression and expansion were exactly the same. The arrival of the "Ship God" in the work brings two diametrically opposite results of "hope" and "destruction" to the fishing village, and is very similar
to what happened to Japan in World War II. Akira Yoshimura used the old way of satirizing the present to allude to Japan's aggression by robbing the wrecked ship.

4.4. Collective Crime in a Culture of Shame

In Ruth Benedict's "Chrysanthemum and Sword", it mentioned that the importance of shame in Japanese life, like any tribe or nation that values shame, is that anyone pays great attention to the public's treatment of themselves. All he has to do is to think about other people's evaluations, and he can adjust his actions based on other people's judgments. When everyone follows the same rules of the game and helps each other, the Japanese play happily and easily. In the works, villagers' collective "sacrificial sacrifice", "salt refining" and other activities reflect the ignorance and foolishness of the villagers in the fishing village. Not only are they not ashamed of this, but they are proud of being able to join the "salt refining" team, and they naively believe that allowing the stronger women to participate in the sacrificial ceremony can greatly increase the chance of the "Ship God" coming. At the same time, the "Ship God" in the work is regarded as a legitimate activity for collective interests, and the national spirit behind it is also worth pondering. In "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword", Benedict wrote about how the Japanese seek national interests, "When they feel that this is the fulfillment of Japan's 'mission', they will do it feverishly". In the works, the boys in the fishing village are all proud of being able to participate in the work of "salt refining", and they treat the common interests of the fishing village - the "Ship God" with an almost fanatic attitude, and the collective crime of robbing the "boat god". The behavior is passed down naturally. However, this logical fanaticism is a stupid, selfish, blind greed based on blindly safeguarding one's own interests and ignoring the interests of others.

5. Conclusion

Although the "Ship God" in the work could bring temporary "prosperity" to the villagers, it was fundamentally different from the "Sea God" belief that was common in traditional Japanese culture and symbolizes a good harvest. The "Ship God" in the novel refers to the merchant ships that died in the past. The sacrifice to the "Ship God" and the salt refining activities directly refer to the acts of plundering and killing. The villagers' collective activities such as praying to the "Ship God", looting the supplies of the wrecked ship, and killing the crew members are essentially a collective crime. Extreme selfishness and inflated greed eventually destroyed the fishing village. The protagonist Isaku, the only surviving young man, is also a member of the fishing village, but he has always been kind-hearted and independent-minded, and he is unwilling to sit back and enjoy his success and insist on going out to the sea to fish every day. This is in common with the author himself, who suffered from militarism, and with the majority of innocent people. It is not difficult to see that Akira Yoshimura uses his usual calm and objective tone to remind readers that no matter how poor life is, he must rely on his own hands to achieve his creative intention.

Acknowledgement

Fund projects: 2019 Program of Humanities and Social Sciences of Guangdong Ocean University "Research on Japanese "Drifting literature", Project No. C19102

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2017.


