

Comparative Research on the Humanistic Tragic Character of Jia Baoyu and Hamlet

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Abstract: Humanism ideal is the most important social trend of thought during the Renaissance. At the same time, Humanism ideal is also the trajectory of Shakespeare's dramatic thought. The 16th century in which Shakespeare lived was an era of glory and cruelty. At that time, British capitalism was in its infancy, and the development of productive forces promoted the prosperity of culture and the emancipation of ideas. Humanistic ideas came into being at the historic moment. Cao Xueqin was at the end of Chinese feudal society in the 18th century. Then, the society had calmed down and the economy was recovering, but production was still hindered by the backward feudal production relations. In this historical period, the political and economic situation is characterized by the disintegration of feudal society and the budding of capitalism. In the entire book of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, there are few injustices and thrilling misery, but the desolate tone has infiltrated people's hearts with illusory myths from the beginning, making the factors of tragedy everywhere. The more you read back, the more tragic the tragic factors are, the more the thread runs through, and finally tangled into a web of tragedy that envelops everything, making people shake heart and soul between lofty and painful. The wonderful pen of *Dream of the Red Mansion* is reminiscent of the tragedy of William Shakespeare, and its protagonist Jia Baoyu is closely comparable to William Shakespeare's famous "Revenge Prince" Hamlet. Inquiring about the meaning of life value is the core of human spiritual will. In this regard, Hamlet is strikingly similar to *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The reversal of destiny caused Danish prince Hamlet to ask about the value of life, and Jia Baoyu, the noble son who fell from heaven on earth to the bottom of the earth, was also struggling for the meaning of life.

Introduction

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1. Shakespeare and Cao Xueqin

Shakespeare lived in the era when the Italian Renaissance tide affected England after the long medieval night. In view of the reaction of the ignorance and asceticism of medieval religious theology and the negation to traditional values, moral concepts, and religious legal concepts, England whose society was known for its strong individualism at that time was in the period of primitive accumulation of capitalism. The bloody enclosure movement caused a large number of self-cultivated farmers to leave their homes and rush to the cities and towns. They were brutally suppressed and became to hired workers. The exchange economic form replaced the natural economy. Cao Xueqin was at the end of Chinese feudal society in the 18th century. In this historical period, the political and economic situation was characterized by the disintegration of feudal society and the budding of capitalism. In the 18th century in China, class conflict and national conflict confronted each other. From the overall situation, the Qing ruling forces occupied a relatively stable position. From the perspective of development, the budding of capitalism, the power of citizens, and the resistance of peasants had become a negative factor for feudal rule. Cao Xueqin “described the difference human situations and the vicissitudes of life with extraordinary details with his remarkable talent, truly revealing the essential characteristics of the time. The rulers of the Qing Dynasty were unwilling to bear the historical fate to be annihilated. On the one hand, they stifled the development of the capitalist economy; on the other hand, they invited the former dead. They used eight-part essay, enlisted the recluse talents who lived in the mountain and forest, set up the history museum of Ming Dynasty, and established erudite department to gain intellectuals. Literary inquisition was raised, intellectuals’ thoughts were imprisoned, heresies were destroyed, and the demands of individual citizens for liberation were suppressed.

2. Language Features of Hamlet and Jia Baoyu

Let’s see a number. Chinese Shakespeare readers, or specifically, the reader of Shakespeare’s famous Hamlet, may not be fewer than those who have read *Dream of the Red Chamber*. I haven’t done statistics, and it is purely subjective estimation, so it can’t be scientific. Furthermore, put the enthusiast readers of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* aside, in terms of ordinary readers, when many people talk about their understanding of life and philosophizing, the famous line spoken by a prince Hamlet “To be, or not to be: that is the question” in the Shakespeare’s drama *Hamlet* translated by Mr Zhu Shenghao is often said. For Jia Baoyu, one of the words we are most familiar with may be: “A woman is made of water. A man is made of mud.” If we’re not emotionally frustrated, or when we feel a girl is so cute and a man is so rebarbative, we generally think that Jia Baoyu ’s words is indeed soft and sloppy like water and mud compared with Hamlet’s. Just as soft and loose. In addition, many people who may speak freely, or accidentally quote the Hamlet’s words when writing an article, they may not read the *Hamlet* translated by Zhu carefully, let alone *Hamlet* in English. Why? In simple terms, because we have already felt the philosophical meaning contained in Shakespeare’s lines from our own destiny without reading the works. It is so vast, rich and profound. Moreover, in understanding and comprehending these words, in most cases, we also ignored Prince Hamlet’s emotion and mood in the drama.

3. The Embodiment of Humanism In Tragedy of Hamlet and Jia Baoyu

Hamlet is the ideal representative of humanist thinkers. The fierce conflict between him and Claudius in the drama truly reflects the sharp contradiction between the brand-new humanism and the feudal British society. At the beginning of the drama, Shakespeare showed an ugly social picture: a court coup in Denmark, in which the old king was killed, and the throne was stolen by the careerist and conspirator. Under the new king’s rule, politics became more corrupt, society became darker, people’s grievances were heated, foreign enemies pressed on to the border, and the throne was in danger. When his father’s ghost appeared, Hamlet learned the truth about his father’s death, but he still watched calmly and reminded himself “to get some more solid evidence first.” He said: “being able to adjust the feelings and intellect so appropriately, destiny cannot play with him at his fingertips.” Ophelia described him as “the eyes of courtiers, the scholars’ tongues, the swords of soldiers, and the flower of the country.” Such a

prince naturally won the support of most people. However, his ideal contradicted the ugly reality. Everything he saw disappointed him, “the insult of the oppressors, the cold eyes of the arrogant, the pain of contempt for love, the delay of the law.”

Jia Baoyu's tragic character is manifested as a ruined rebellious aristocratic youth image. Born at the time when Jia Mansion was in decline, he was the most intelligent among many descendants. When the gloomy scenes were helpless, all the fantasy of Jia Mansion rested on him. His father asked him to “familiarize the *Four Books*” in order to get the official rank. Xue Baochai and Shi Xiangyun persuaded him to learn “official career economy” and “social engagement”, and Xiren softened him to “keep an eye on Confucius and Meng and start from the economy”... A kind of tangible and invisible “field” keeps him under control all the time. But he did not follow the feudal tradition to be a docile loyal minister and filial son, but instead took the path of life to maintain his independent personality. At that time, the decaying and feudal mechanism was even harsher. The “perfect person” needed by feudal society was domesticated according to the rigorous level, and it basically turned people into machines. Jia Baoyu's pursuit of individual liberation and individual freedom is impossible to achieve in a society characterized by personal dependence. His rebellious behavior—concerns about the fate of oppressed and devastated women, his aversion to the imperial examination system, and the denial of the standards of human behavior in feudal society—was spread with rebellious love. His love with Lin Daiyu is a harmonious note issued after the impact of spirit and sex. However, in that dark age, the ugly phenomenon was regarded as reasonable and the human's supreme good and beautiful emotion was dismissed as an indecent activity. Baoyu and Daiyu's love was like the light of the dark kingdom, showing human's good nature and the development of history was inevitable. It reflected the dawn of modern humanity and justice, and fundamentally negated feudal etiquette, feudal moral, marriage system, hierarchies and even the entire feudal society .

Conclusion

In the history of Chinese classical literature, Cao Xueqin was arrogant, unconventional and unrestrained throughout his life. He despised the prevalent custom, and hated the feudal ethical code. Such a “rebellion” will not be secularly understood anyway. He put all the tragic situation in his life tragedy and the lashing, ridicule and condemnation to the secularity in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. “The author made this book finish with lots of grief and tears. On the New Year's Eve of Renwu, the book was not finished, but Qin died with tears used up”, which is really “Pages full of fantastic talk. Penned with bitter tears”. In the history of Western literature, Shakespeare's tragedy fully reflected that the tragedy of character led to the tragic ending of the protagonist. Bradley believed that the biggest feature of Shakespeare's tragedy is that “the contradictions in the tragedy do not occur between the tragic protagonist and others, nor between opposing groups, but occur within the divided protagonist.” It embodies the “eternal contradiction between human's weakness and courage, stupidity and excellence, fragility and strength”, and emphasizes “the coexistence of sublime and abjection in the tragic protagonist”.

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