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An Analysis of the Literature's Truth, Goodness and Beauty

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Abstract

Literary works are an important medium for the exploration of truth, goodness and beauty, of which human beings have never stopped the discussion and pursuit. First of all, this paper gives an overview of what are truth, goodness and beauty. Then it summarizes what has been the focus of the unity of truth, goodness and beauty between China and the West. Finally, this paper values the analysis of the truth, goodness and beauty of literary works: the facts of literature should be true, the purpose should be good, and the form should be beautiful. Based on this, the author puts forward the relationship between the three harmonies with the unity of truth, goodness and beauty in literary works, which the author believes is the ultimate pursuit of literature.

Keywords: Literary Works; Truth; Goodness and Beauty; Unity

1. INTRODUCTION

Truth, goodness and beauty are eternal topics of human beings. It is human nature to pursue truth, do good and love beauty. Since the emergence of human beings, people have never stopped exploring and pursuing truth, goodness and beauty for a moment. Liu Xie, a classical literary theorist in China, has defined the truth, goodness and beauty of literature. When President Xi Jinping presided over a forum on literature and art in Beijing in 2014, he also put forward requirements for the truth, goodness and beauty of literature and art. The facts of literary works should be true, the purpose should be good, and the form should be beautiful. On this basis, the author puts forward the relationship between three harmonies with the unity of truth, goodness and beauty in literary works.

2. TRUTH, GOODNESS, BEAUTY AND THEIR UNITY

2.1. Basic Connotations

2.1.1. Truth

Truth (in Chinese "真"), in the *Great Chinese Dictionary*, is consistent with the objective facts, as opposed to falsehood. In *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (Word and expression), it means that immortals or immortal people are transformed into heaven. In Chinese, "Zhen Ren Palace" (真人府), "Zhen Immortality" (真仙) and "Zhen Gentleman" (真君) are all related to immortals. Taoists believe that the cultivation of human nature and the practice of truth is true. Laozi said: "if you don't know, that's good; if you pretend to know, that's awful." At the beginning of the book *The Tao Te Ching*, it is said, "The beginning of everything is nameless, which is beyond the reach of human understanding." Zhuangzi during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Period thought that truth was nature, essence, honesty, sincerity, and truth. Western Plato tells us that truth is objective and the basis of human reality. The objectivity and regularity of the subject in thought and behavior, have reached the realm of truth. This is the unified state between the subject and the object based on the object scale[1].

2.1.2. Goodness

Goodness (in Chinese "善"), in the fifth edition of the *Great Chinese Dictionary*, is interpreted as charity, good deeds

as opposed to evil. In ancient China, the character of "善" means auspicious sheep, or good words and speeches. In *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (Word and expression) it is also said to be auspicious. The ancient Chinese classic *Guoyu•Jinyu* (A history book recording the social affairs in the Spring and Autumn Period) calls goodness the construction of virtue. In *Tso Chuan* it means three virtues (grace, cultivation, wisdom). Lao Tsu's *The Tao Te Ching*: the goodness is like water; the utmost goodness is like water, nourishing everything without demanding merit, a peace of mind, love and selflessness. In Marxist philosophy, goodness refers to the correspondence between subject and object in the process of social practice. What matters here is to think about the satisfaction of the object to the needs of the subject and to what extent it is satisfied.

2.1.3. Beauty

Beauty (in Chinese "美"), in the fifth edition of the *Great Chinese Dictionary* is explained as beautiful and opposite to ugliness. In ancient China, the character of "美" refers to the sheep and the big, which are so delicious to eat; therefore, the original intention of "美" refers to the beauty of delicacy. In *Guan Zi • Five Elements* (A book written by Guan Zhong in the Spring and Autumn Period), it is called the sweet water in spring. Kant believed that beauty was subjective and rational. This ultimate sense of beauty, concerning no goodness and evil, returns to the embrace of mother earth. The dust of wisdom, all worldly, has been swept away; the human soul has been the highest sublimation and liberation [2]. Schiller, a German philosopher, pointed out that beauty was in fact the stipulation of things themselves; beauty was the form of freedom, and freedom was a rational concept and the objective attribute of freedom endows things with beauty [3].

2.2. Unity

The Great Chinese Dictionary explains that truth, goodness and beauty are true or beautiful in essence. In his speech at the national propaganda work conference of the Communist Party of China, Chairman Mao Zedong pointed out that people had always been talking about truth, goodness and beauty, and the opposition of truth, goodness and beauty was false, evil and ugliness. Without falsehood, evil and ugliness, there is no truth, goodness and beauty[5]. Mr. Xu Fanting said in *The Interpretation of Truth, Goodness and Beauty* that truth was realness, beauty was delicacy, and goodness was reason. Mr. Mou Zongsan believed that the common pursuit of Chinese and Western philosophy was the unity of truth, goodness and beauty. Only the unity of the three is the highest harmony. Mencius first put forward the unified view of human nature of truth, goodness and beauty. He divided personality into six levels: beauty, faith, goodness, greatness, saint and god. Diderot said truth, goodness and beauty were very similar qualities; the first two appears to be wonderful if added some rare and outstanding things [4]. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx explained that truth, goodness and beauty arose from human labor. In western philosophy, philosophical ontology is the pursuit of existence and the embodiment of truth, goodness and beauty. It is impossible for a real work of art to draw a part from one position without compromising the meaning of the whole work [5].

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRUTH, GOODNESS, BEAUTY & THEIR UNITY AND LITERATURE

The highest purpose of truth, goodness and beauty is the law of creation in literature and art. In the academic classical Chinese literary theory book *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, Liu Xie pointed out that in literary works: first, the emotion was real, not weird; second, the style was clearness-oriented, not miscellaneous; third, the story was realistic, not absurd; forth, the theme was to promote righteousness and chastity, not evil; fifth, the writing style was concise, not complicated; the diction was resplendent, not redundancy[11]. Zeng Mengpu said: the facts in literary works should be true; the text structure and syntax in literary works should be beautiful; and the purpose of literature, the spiritual food that the literary works bring to the readers should be good [6]. In terms of the academic world, science seeks truth; literature seeks beauty; religion seeks goodness. The essence of literature is the unity of truth, goodness and beauty, which is inclined to politics in the view of Professor Zeng Fanren of Shandong University, China. Truth is what the literature really about; goodness is the political position represented by literature; beauty, of course, refers to the appeal of art. Yu Qiuyu also said that literature and art could not be separated from politics[12].

3.1. Truth, Goodness, Beauty and Literature

3.1.1. Truth and Literature

When President Xi Jinping held a forum on literary and artistic work in Beijing on October 15, 2014, he stressed that the eternal value of literature and art is the pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty: literature and art is essentially the literature and art of the people. “the people are the source of literary and artistic creation. Otherwise, literature and art will become rootless duckweed, disease-free groans, and soulless bodies. Whether we can produce excellent works or not depends on whether we can express our feelings for the people”[7]. Literature should draw nourishment from the practice and life of the people. In the view of President Xi, when creating literature, writers must follow the laws of people's life, should not lose in the market economy and keep up with the development of the times. It is necessary to include the coldness and warmness of the people, the happiness of the people, the joys and sorrows of the people, the struggle and life of the people, and the people's longing for a better life into literary works. Literary works should not fabricate facts or make things up. Only those who come from the lives of the people can move the hearts of readers. This is the truth of literary works. When the writers of Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture carry on the literary creation, their works can often grasp the objective law of the people, to reveal the unique way of life in the local society. In the novel *The Village without Time* Khampa Tibetan writer Kelron Zsumey describes the flail, iron, machine and the last law in the development of the village, as well as the villagers’ choices in the face of birth, old age, illness and death and external impact[13]. In another novel *The Secluded Face* Kelron Zsumey described the unique national customs and historical evolution of the Dingqu River Valley in Tibet, the villagers' belief in Tibetan Buddhism and primitive Bonpo, the piety of the living Buddha, the impact of modern civilization on Tibetan villages, the decline of the Yage family, and so on. Despite the use of magical realism and the interpretation of Baudelaire’s imagism motif in the novel, the stories are really derived from the ancient and simple Tibetan people[14]. It can be said that the literary creation of Khampa writers is inseparable from the vast and magical Khampa Plateau.

3.1.2. Goodness and Literature

Xi Jinping stressed that literary and artistic works should convey upward and good values, embody truth, goodness and beauty, “guide people to strengthen their moral judgment and moral sense of honor, and pursue a morally respectful life.”[7] The Chinese nation should yearn for the truth, goodness and beauty from generation to generation, and guide people to be always hopeful and healthy. In the view of President Xi, the so-called goodness of literary works should enlighten the soul like a harmonious spring breeze, guide people to firmly establish socialist core values, and meet the needs of social development. Specifically, it is necessary to meet the needs of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’s dream, bring the whole society full of positive energy, and enhance the spirit of being a Chinese. This is the goodness of literary works. From this we can see that the relationship between goodness and literature is particularly important. The Khampa Tibetan writer Alai wrote in the novel *Three Cordyceps* that “I am willing to write about the pain, suffering, evil and so on that we has experienced. Even if the world is full of greed and sin, I am still willing to maintain a warm yearning for human nature.”[8] The two main characters of Gilgamesh and Enqi in *Gilgamesh*, the most important epic in Babylonian literature, are the kings and heroes of ancient times. Gilgamesh had superhuman power, but he had unbearable arrogance. Strangers (actually created by the gods) came to challenge, and eventually they became good friends[9]. Western scholars believe that this epic literature engraved on the clay plate can be spread to the present, mainly because of the enlightening effect of the story on human beings. The goodwill shown by the king to strangers has enhanced the people's yearning for the warmth of human nature at the bottom. Such a country must be strong.

3.1.3. Beauty and Literature

Xi Jinping further said that literary and artistic works were popular but not vulgar; hope did not represent desire; sensory entertainment did not represent spiritual pleasure. The reason why they were fine works “lies in their profound thinking, exquisite art and excellent production. We should advocate the full development of genres, themes, forms and means, and promote ideas, contents, styles and schools to learn from each other.”[7] In the view of President Xi, the so-called beauty of literary works is to produce more fine works, popular but not vulgar, and the art of literary creation should be superb. The literary genres (oral literature, poetry, fiction, drama) are beautiful in

their organization. Literary concepts, contents, styles, schools and other cross-civilized, cross-regional, cross-cultural, cross-fields exchanges and dialogue have further promoted the vitality of literature, through innovative development, to enrich the literary image, to make it more distinct, more profound, more dazzling, more compelling. This is the beauty of literary works. From this point of view, the beauty of literature lies in the beauty of thought and organization. The four famous ancient Chinese classic works *Water margin, Romance of the three Kingdoms, Journey to the West and A Dream of Red Mansion* can be called fine works in terms of ideological depth and plot arrangement. In the preface to his novel *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*, Mo Yan said that a good novel should be polysemous, and the theme of the novel should have a fuzzy zone between love and hate, good and evil, which could bring readers a wealth of thinking and recollection. A high-density novel has been misread by generation after generation. Its strange (innovative) structure (form and content), unfamiliar language, and thoughts about suffering can all reflect the writer's artistic talent and artistic imagination [10]. His works will become classics over time.

3.2. Their Unity and Three Harmonies in Literature

The author of this paper believes that since literature is a study of human beings, the pursuit of the value of truth, goodness and beauty in literature is eternal. From a cultural point of view, under the dual opposing cultural values of the West, we pay more attention to truth; under the cultural values of the unity of man and nature in China, we pay more attention to goodness. The truth, goodness and beauty in literature should also take care of the following three dimensions: harmony between man and nature, man and man, body and mind. These three kinds of harmonies and truth, goodness and beauty have inherent unity. Truth, goodness and beauty is the unity of regularity, purpose and aesthetics. The harmony of subject and object (man and nature, man and man, man's body and heart), that is, the harmony of natural ecology, social ecology and spiritual ecology. What literature solves is the three opposites between the subjects and objects. In literary works, the people of the subject are always seeking to grasp the regularity of the object and achieve the unity with the cognition of the object. Only by recognizing the existence of the object and achieving the harmonious unity can the process of exploring the truth, goodness and beauty of literary works be completed.

3.2.1. Their Unity and Natural Ecology in Literature

Nature is an indispensable element of literary works, which is inextricably linked with the protagonists in literary works. The process of man's cognition of nature is also accompanied by the pursuit of the values of truth, goodness and beauty. In the novel *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy, a famous British realistic writer in the 19th century, Jude, the protagonist, showed the process of understanding nature, the ultimate concern for natural ecology. The background of the novel is the Industrial Revolution. The machine civilization plundered the nature; the Industrial Revolution changed the original natural features of the countryside, monasteries abandoned, ancient houses withered. Jude, following Mr. Phillotson’s instructions, took the initiative to make friends with the birds and risked being fired and beaten by his master to let birds look for food in the haystack. He could not stand earthworms being trampled to death and trees being cut down or trimmed. He lamented that the old parish was now so humiliated[15]. It can be said that when he was a child, Jude tried to understand the nature around him, tried to resolve the contradiction between the subject and the object nature, and achieve his own cognition of the truth. Compassion for small animals shows Jude's goodness in human nature, and the pain of the destruction of parish monasteries shows Jude's confusion about the lack of beauty. Jude's life is a cognitive process of truth, goodness and beauty in dealing with the relationship with nature.

3.2.2. Their Unity and Social Ecology in Literature

Society or man is the core element of literary works. The literary and artistic activities produced in the primitive society have always been associated with material production and labor, and the purpose of literary creation is, of course, to serve material production at the beginning. Literature is the behavior of imitation. On the one hand, the creation of literature meets the needs of imitation for the sake of material production, and at the same time, it is also an important means to understand society, form social ties, and carry forward the values of truth, goodness and beauty. In the literature of the Middle Kingdom of ancient Egypt, a 16th century “ballad” is recorded on the tombstone: “hurry up, leader / beat the bulls / look, where the king is standing / looking at us?”[9] The ballad

describes the scene of material production and slave labor at that time. The slaves worked under the supervision of the king, very frightened and nervous, and truly represented the lack of freedom of the slave labor. The ballad essentially reflects the slaves' yearning for equality, the euphemistic rebuke to despotism, the desire for the king to show goodwill, the desire for beauty and harmony in life, and the real free life. This is the simple pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty in dealing with the relationship with society in the early literature of world civilization.

3.2.3. Their Unity and Spiritual Ecology in Literature

The author of this paper believes that most of the people in literature also pay attention to their own spiritual ecology, that is, the requirements of their own harmonious development: the unity of knowledge and truth, meaning, beauty, and perfect ideal personality. The most important of these is to shape the soul, the integrity of the soul and the body. Do people have souls? According to the *Book of the Dead*, an ancient Egyptian religious works, everyone has a soul and a body. A short departure of the soul from the body is sleep, and a long absence is death. The human soul called "Ku" live in the body when we are alive, and go on a trip to the next session after death[9]. The ancient Egyptians wanted to preserve the mummified corpses so that the soul could return and people would be resurrected from the dead. People in literature place special emphasis on the placement of their souls and bodies, not for immortality but for perfection.

In Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure*, the hero Jude has both the spiritual ecological balance and the imbalance. Jude was kind to animals, worked hard to learn Latin, and looked forward to achieving the love of truth, goodness and beauty, but his spiritual ecology was out of balance in the face of the temptation of two women, Isabella and Sue. For sexual desire, he married Isabella at will; in order to pursue a new woman with rebellious spirit, he eloped with Sue in a poor life[15]. In Khampa Tibetan literature, the hero in Alai's novel *Red Poppies* is a "fool" image, enjoying the love affairs with his maiden Sangkyi Drelma, Tana (his slave) and Tana (the daughter of Rongong chieftain). But every morning he woke up and asked a question, "who am I? Where am I?"[16] He enjoyed the power, money, women: the secular entertainment, but also lost the establishment of the true, good and beautiful personality, a pathetic imbalance of spiritual ecology. As he lied in a pool of blood, his body slowly divided into two parts, the soul broke away from the bleeding body slowly drifting away, leaving nothing behind. He prayed that if there were reincarnation, he would like to return to this beautiful place.

4. CONCLUSION

Truth, goodness and beauty are not only the eternal theme of literature, but also the standards of literary criticism. There are often three pairs of relations in literature: the harmonious unity of truth, goodness and beauty with natural ecology, social ecology and spiritual ecology, which is precisely the main form of world civilization. The truth, goodness and beauty of literature essentially reflect the ethical spirit of man and nature, subject and object in life. Today, with the increasingly serious ecological crisis, the serious opposition and separation between the subject and the object, and the increasingly vague understanding of ethics and morality, the discussion of the theme of truth, goodness and beauty in literature is particularly precious. The minority literature in Chinese and western literature contains rich wisdom of truth, goodness and beauty, which can become a good research topic for researchers.

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