



Multidimensional Symbols and Metaphors of Tea Culture: Taking Lu Xun, Lao She and Zhou Zuoren's "Drinking Tea" as an Example

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the descriptions of "drinking tea" in the works of Lu Xun, Lao She and Zhou Zuoren, and probes into the multi-dimensional symbolism and metaphor of tea culture. Through the description of tea drinking experience, Lu Xun's Tea Drinking reveals the stratification, criticizes the privilege and detachment from reality of cultural elites, and emphasizes social responsibility. Influenced by the Japanese tea ceremony, Zhou Zuoren's Tea shows the idea of pursuing the art of life and spiritual cultivation, embodies the philosophy of "taking a break from the busy, enjoying the bitter", and reflects the change of mood; Lao She's Teahouse takes teahouse as a microcosm of society, reflecting class differences through different consumption of tea, revealing social decay, injustice and people's suffering. These works present the rich connotation of tea culture in literature from different angles, reflect the writers' outlook on life and social critical consciousness, and provide multiple perspectives for understanding the society and writers' thoughts at that time.

Keywords: Tea culture; Lu Xun; Lao She; Zhou Zuoren; A symbol; Metaphor

1 Introduction

Tea, since ancient times, has become one of the most important symbols in Chinese culture. From the high Kings and generals to ordinary ordinary people, tea is like a tough bond, running through all levels of society, and has undoubtedly become an indispensable and vital part of People's Daily life. In the rich and colorful literary works, tea is often closely related to the specific cultural background, and the specific situation of The Times, but also deeply intertwined with the rich emotions of individuals. At the beginning to the middle of the 20th century, China experienced a series of major social changes. The mad invasion of imperialism came like a raging flood, the feudal system gradually collapsed in the torrent of history, the Republic of China was established, and the new culture movement was in full swing. This series of important historical events all profoundly affected the literati's creative

mentality. In these earth-shaking changes, tea culture, as an ancient and time-honored symbol, has been re-endowed with a new meaning.

Lu Xun, Lao She and Zhou Zuoren, three representative writers in the history of modern Chinese literature, took tea as a unique entry point to deeply explore different levels of cultural and social issues. In his prose "Drinking Tea", Lu Xun deeply reveals the stark class opposition between the cultural elite and the ordinary people through the meticulous description of the process of drinking tea, and fully expresses his critical thinking of culture. Lao She skillfully used the Teahouse as a public space in Teahouse to vividly demonstrate the turbulent social reality from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, and deeply reflected the decline and change of society through the tea in the teahouse. From the subtle Angle of daily life, Zhou Zuoren reveals the life philosophy behind the tea ceremony through Tea Drinking, emphasizing the spiritual pursuit of striving for a

moment of tranquility in the busy life. Through in-depth analysis of these works, we can clearly reveal the multiple symbolic meanings of tea culture in modern literature.

2 Tea as a Class Symbol and Cultural Label

2.1 The Comparison between the Cultural Elite and Ordinary People in Lu Xun's Tea

Lu Xun's prose "Drinking Tea" was published in 1933, which is one of the important stages of his late creation. Through a concise and clear narrative, this short essay takes the unique experience of drinking tea as a starting point to deeply and carefully explore the problem of class differentiation in society at that time. In the article, Lu Xun vividly describes his real feelings of drinking tea in different environments, especially emphasizing the sharp contrast between drinking good tea and drinking rough tea with a tureen, which aims to deeply reveal the great differences in people's feelings about life in different classes. He firmly believes that drinking good tea is a kind of "blessing", and to enjoy this "blessing", you need to have a lot of "time" and a "special feeling" to appreciate, however, this "time" and "feeling" is precisely the special privilege of the cultural elite.

Here Lu Xun subtly hinted at the huge difference between the cultural elite and the bottom workers in the society at that time. He clearly pointed out that even the best Longjing tea, if given to those strong workers, they may not be able to truly appreciate the beauty of it. This is because they are so busy making a living that they can't stop to savor the delicate feelings of life. Lu Xun used this to satirize the cultural elite's keen perception of the details of life, and argued that this perception is not a privilege for everyone. From the perspective of social background, Lu Xun's observation profoundly reflects the state of alienation between the intellectual class and the ordinary people in the Republic of China, as well as the hypocrisy of the cultural elite's enjoyment of their own privileges and detachment from social reality.

In Lu Xun's works, tea is not only an ordinary drink, but also a symbol of a clear distinction between social classes. The hierarchical sense of tea and the skills of tea tasting fully reflect the lifestyle of the cultural elite, which is narcissistic and far from reality. Through his personal experience, he criticizes the disconnect between cultural elites and real life, revealing their unconscious indulgence of their own cultural privilege. Lu Xun's description also fully reflects his

profound insight into Chinese society, that is, the keen feelings of cultural elites not only did not bring positive help to the progress of society, but also became a clear symbol of their separation from the bottom society.

2.2 Daily and Philosophical Thoughts in Zhou Zuoren's Drinking Tea

Zhou Zuoren also deeply discussed the cultural connotation of tea in Tea, but he was obviously different from Lu Xun in that he paid more attention to the spiritual pursuit of individuals in daily life. Deeply influenced by the Japanese tea ceremony, Zhou mentions the concept of "tea ceremony" many times in his essays, and makes a careful comparison with the Chinese way of brewing tea. He clearly pointed out that the tea ceremony embodies a life philosophy of "taking a break from the busy and enjoying the pain", emphasizing the effort to find a moment of beauty and harmony amid the busyness and hardships of daily life. This kind of beautiful experience lies in simplicity and nature, and tea has therefore become an important tool for people to pursue the art of life and spiritual cultivation.

Unlike Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, when talking about drinking tea, pays more attention to the spiritual pleasure brought by tea and those small and certain happiness in life. In "Drinking Tea", he mentioned that drinking tea should be "under the tiled house paper window, clear spring green tea, with a simple ceramic tea set, drink with two or three people, get half a day of leisure, can be worth ten years of dust dream". This kind of leisure and peaceful life scene is Zhou Zuoren's deep understanding of tea ceremony, that is, to achieve spiritual fullness and satisfaction through simple life style. Zhou Zuoren lived during the period of the Republic of China, a time of social unrest in China, when many intellectuals were trapped in cultural anxiety and spiritual emptiness, and he tried to find a way to balance and settle himself through aesthetic experiences in daily life.

2.3 The Social Symbol and Class Metaphor of Tea in Lao She's Teahouse

Lao She's Teahouse takes the teahouse as a highly condensed microcosm of society, vividly showing the ups and downs of the fate of all social classes from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China. Teahouse in "Teahouse" is not only a place to drink tea, but also an important stage for various social figures to gather. Through the rise and fall of

the teahouse, Lao She brilliantly shows the social turmoil, corruption and decline of the time. The tea in the teahouse symbolizes the living conditions of all social strata - the bottom people can only drink crude tea, while the upper people can enjoy delicate tea products, and this difference not only reflects their economic status, but also a profound metaphor for social class.

Through the dialogues in the teahouse and the changes in the fate of the characters, Lao She deeply reveals the decline of society and the powerlessness of the people. In the social background, the decadent regime in the late Qing Dynasty, the chaotic situation in the Republic of China, and the helplessness and confusion of ordinary people in these historical changes are vividly expressed through the relationship between people and tea in teahouses. Tea is not only an important tool to maintain the business of the tea house, but also a symbol of the fate of the characters. The fate changes of people of different classes in the teahouse, like a vivid historical picture, reflect the changes of Chinese society in modern times and social injustice.

In the description of tea culture, Lao She emphasized the plight of the people at the bottom and the serious differentiation of social classes. Tea, as a daily drink, not only carries an individual's way of living in Teahouse, but also reflects the great inequality of society. The symbol of tea is not only a necessity for survival, but also a class symbol, which profoundly reveals the suffering and hopelessness at the bottom of society.

3 Tea as a Life Philosophy and Spiritual Cultivation

3.1 Lu Xun's Criticism of "Qingfu" and "Autumn Thought"

Lu Xun mentioned the concept of "Qingfu" in "Drinking Tea", and he believed that enjoying good tea was a "Qingfu" unique to the cultural elite, but he immediately questioned whether this way of life was really valuable. Lu Xun expressed his severe criticism of the excessive self-intoxication of the cultural elite through the spicy satire of "Qingfu". He pointed out that although this keen feeling can be counted as "progress" to a certain extent, if this feeling is too delicate, even affecting the practical utility of life, then it becomes a disease.

In the article, he mentioned "Autumn thinking", quoted Song Yu's "Nine Arguments" in "sad autumn as gas", and pointed out that there is a sharp opposition between the

sensitive emotions of writers and ordinary workers. For the literati, the rain and rain of autumn are the source of sadness and a kind of "thorn and halberd", but for an old farmer, autumn is just the season of rice maturity, which means the harvest of labor. Through this strong contrast, Lu Xun deeply reveals the serious disconnect between the cultural elite's self-indulgence and real life.

In Lu Xun's time, China was undergoing great changes of revolution and modernization, and many intellectuals fell into cultural anxiety and spiritual dilemma. They often resort to the tea ceremony, art or other symbols of exquisite life to escape the difficulties and social problems of reality. Lu Xun expressed strong dissatisfaction with this evasive attitude. He believed that the cultural elite indulged in "Qingfu" and "autumn thinking", which was an evasion of social responsibility. By criticizing "Qingfu", he actually criticized the bad tendency of intellectuals at that time to flee from reality and avoid responsibility during the period of social change, believing that they only paid attention to their own spiritual enjoyment, and ignored the intervention in social problems and the promotion of change.

In this article, Lu Xun deeply reveals the hypocrisy and self-comfort of literati and writers through the symbol of tea. He pointed out that excessive cultural sensitivity does not save society, but makes intellectuals lose the courage to face reality. This criticism not only reflects Lu Xun's disappointment to the intellectuals at that time, but also his profound thinking about the general attitude of the cultural elite. Lu Xun's Tea is not only about tea, but also a comprehensive critique of Chinese culture and intellectual attitudes, especially in the context of social unrest and change, tea has become a mirror to reflect cultural hypocrisy.

3.2 Zhou Zuoren's Tea Ceremony Thoughts and Spiritual Settlement

Compared with Lu Xun's criticism, Zhou Zuoren's understanding of tea is more focused on the settlement of personal life and spiritual cultivation. In Zhou Zuoren's view, drinking tea is not only a cultural activity, but also a philosophy and an attitude towards life. In *Drinking Tea*, he discusses in detail the manner and context of drinking tea, with particular reference to the influence of the Japanese tea ceremony. Japanese tea ceremony emphasizes simplicity, peace and solitude, which coincides with Zhou Zuoren's pursuit of the art of life.

Zhou Zuoren regards drinking tea as a kind of "leisure" in the busy life, and a kind of "happiness" in the suffering and pressure. He believes that through the simple act of drinking tea, people can temporarily escape the complicated reality and find inner peace and harmony. Tea is not only a drink, but also an important tool for people to precipitate their hearts and cultivate their spirits. Zhou Zuoren was deeply influenced by Japanese culture, and he advocated the pursuit of personal spiritual settlement through aesthetics in daily life, which was closely related to his profound reflection on traditional Chinese culture and modern Western culture.

Zhou Zuoren lived in the Republic of China, an era when Western ideas and culture strongly impacted Chinese tradition. In the social upheaval and cultural change, intellectuals are generally faced with the problem of how to deal with the cultural conflict between the East and the West. In his articles, Zhou Zuoren often tries to find a balanced path through his personal philosophy of life. In his opinion, drinking tea is not only a kind of material enjoyment, but also a kind of spiritual cultivation, and an artistic experience in daily trifles. By drinking tea, people can temporarily escape the hustle and bustle of society and find inner balance and peace. This view conflicts with his simulation of modern lifestyles.

This idea of Zhou Zuoren in the tea ceremony fully reflects his high attention to the personal spiritual world. He advocated a simple life to resist the noise and pressure of modern life, and advocated to find a moment of peace and satisfaction in the busy real life. Zhou Zuoren's admiration for everyday aesthetics was closely related to his attitude towards life, as well as to the cultural conflict and spiritual confusion of intellectuals during the period of social upheaval in China at that time. In Zhou Zuoren's "Drinking Tea", tea becomes an important carrier for him to settle himself and seek inner balance. Unlike Lu Xun's sharp criticism, Zhou Zuoren is more inclined to resist the turmoil of the outside world through the rituals of daily life, such as drinking tea, in pursuit of a detached, spiritual peace. This philosophy of life is not only a response to social unrest, but also an effective way for Zhou Zuoren to seek self-redemption in cultural conflict and spiritual confusion.

Through drinking tea, Zhou Zuoren shows his love for simple life and escape from complex reality. His concept of tea ceremony is not to criticize society directly, but to find a way to redeem himself in the chaotic times. His writings are

often full of praise for the small everyday things, believing that in these details hidden wisdom and the true meaning of life. Tea, as an important part of it, carries his attitude towards life and a strong desire for spiritual peace.

3.3 Tea and Social Changes in Lao She's Teahouse

Lao She's Teahouse is different from Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren's personal reflection, it is a broad description and criticism of the whole society. Through the teahouse, a public space, Lao She vividly demonstrates the multiple contradictions and conflicts of Chinese society in turbulent times. Teahouse, as a microcosm of society, brings together all kinds of people, from the bottom people to the upper elites, who stage various tragedies and absurdities of society in the teahouse.

The symbolic significance of tea in Teahouse is not limited to drinks, it is an important medium of social communication, a powerful witness of the relationship between people, and an important tool used by Lao She to reveal social problems. In the turbulent historical background from the end of Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, tea in teahouses gradually lost its original leisure and cultural connotation, and became an important stage bearing social contradictions. Lao She deeply reveals the decay and hopelessness of society through the dialogue of the characters in the teahouse and the ups and downs of fate.

In Teahouse, tea not only symbolizes everyday life, but also becomes a profound metaphor for class division and social oppression. Lao She vividly demonstrates social injustice and inequality through the consumption of tea by people of different classes. The upper class showed power and status through exquisite tea, while the lower class could only drink cheap crude products, and even the tea itself gradually became irrelevant. The decline of the teahouse symbolizes the decline of society, and the tragic fate of the characters reflects Lao She's critical thinking about the hopelessness of social reform.

4 Conclusion

Through the in-depth analysis of the tea culture description in the works of Lu Xun, Lao She and Zhou Zuoren, we can clearly see that tea carries extremely rich multiple symbolic meanings in modern literature.

For Lu Xun, tea is not only a drink, but also a powerful symbol of class distinction and cultural criticism. Under his

command, the distinction between the grades of tea and the specific conditions required to enjoy tea, such as "effort" and "special feeling," became an important mark separating the cultural elite from the general public. Lu Xun's meticulous depiction of the act of drinking tea deeply reflects his sharp criticism of the cultural elite's narcissism and detachment from real life. He took tea as a mirror, reflecting the huge gap in life and ideological estrangement between the cultural elite and the working people at the bottom of the society at that time, revealing the inner emptiness hidden behind the exquisite life of the cultural elite and the alienation from the real society. This criticism is not only a criticism of individual behavior, but also a reflection on the whole social and cultural atmosphere, showing Lu Xun's deep concern for social justice and people's suffering.

For Zhou Zuoren, tea is a symbol of life philosophy and spiritual cultivation. Influenced by the Japanese tea ceremony, he sees tea as an important way to find a moment of peace amid the hustle and bustle of modern life. Zhou Zuoren emphasizes the life philosophy of "taking a break from the busy and enjoying the pain" contained in the tea ceremony, and believes that through the simple act of drinking tea, people can find a moment of beauty and harmony in the busy and difficult life. He advocated finding a place to settle himself in the aesthetics of daily life. At that time when Western culture was impacted and traditional culture was facing tension, tea became an important tool for him to pursue spiritual fullness and satisfaction. Zhou Zuoren's concept of tea ceremony reflects his high attention to the personal spiritual world. Through his praise and admiration for tea, he expresses his love for simple life and escape from complex reality, trying to find a way for himself to redeem himself in the chaotic times.

In Lao She's Teahouse, tea becomes a microcosm of society, carrying a profound critique of historical change and social injustice. As a public space, teahouse brings together people from all walks of life. Tea in teahouse is not only a drink, but also a medium of social communication and a witness of the relationship between people. Lao She vividly shows social injustice and inequality through the difference in tea consumption among people of different classes. The upper class enjoyed exquisite tea to demonstrate their power and status; The lower classes could only drink cheap crude tea, and even tea itself gradually became irrelevant in their lives. The rise and fall of the teahouse symbolizes the decline

of society, and the tragic fate of the characters reflects Lao She's critical thinking about the hopelessness of social reform.

In the works of these writers, tea culture is by no means just an ordinary part of life. Through different symbols and metaphors, it shows the writer's deep thinking about the individual and society, tradition and modernity. Lu Xun used tea as a weapon to criticize the injustice of society and the hypocrisy of cultural elites. Zhou Zuoren takes tea as sustenance to pursue spiritual tranquility and self-salvation; Lao She reveals social changes and people's sufferings from the perspective of tea. Tea, an ancient symbol, has been given a new meaning in their works, and has become an important medium to explore the relationship between culture, society and individuals in modern literature. It connects the past and the present, traditional and modern, so that we can taste the fragrance of tea at the same time, but also can deeply feel the changes of the era and the humanistic care of writers.

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