

Research on the Development of Review on Traditional Chinese Novel in Ming and Qing Dynasties: A Case Study of Review on Outlaws of the Marshes By Li Zhi and Jin Shengtan

Ruoxi Li^{1, a}

¹Journal Editorial Department, Sichuan University of Arts and science, Dazhou 635000, China.

^a66523362@qq.com

Abstract

During Ming and Qing Dynasties, novel review developed rapidly and reached its climax. Reviews on ancient Chinese novels are annotated in the text, in the page header or in the left and right margins. Although all those remarks seems to be not systematic, they contain the creative theory of ancient Chinese novel. Li Zhi and Jin Shengtan's review of Outlaws of the Marshes are the brilliant example of ancient literary review. On the basis of Jin Shengtan's review, Li Zhi makes further contribution to the review of Outlaws of the Marshes, which shows the developing trend of literary review of Ming and Qing Dynasties, namely, from simple to complicated, from casual to systematic, from general to detailed. It is of epoch-making significance in the history of Chinese literacy review.

Keywords

Outlaws of the Marshes; Li Zhi; Jin Shengtan; Ming and Qing Dynasties; novel review.

1. Introduction

Among all the reviews of Outlaws of the Marshes, the most famous are Li Zhi and Jin Shengtan's versions. And nowadays the research on the review of Outlaws of the Marshes focus on Li Zhi's (Li's Version) and Jin Shengtan's version (Jin's version). As early as 1983, Chen Xinian wrote a book called On the Contribution of Novel review in Ming and Qing dynasties to the aesthetics of Classical Chinese novels which talked about Li and Jin's version. With time goes by, there are more articles about the review on Outlaws of the Marshes [1]. In 2005, there are around 16 articles on this field just in China, such as A Study of Narrative Theory about Jin Shengtan's review in Outlaws of the Marsh by Ma Jiangwei, and Jin Shengtan's Theory on Writing by Fan Lingling and so on [2-3]. However, the number of articles on this field is declining from 2016, only one in 2018, A Summary of Jin Shengtan's Comments on The Water Margin in Recent Thirty Year by Ouyang Yuanping [4]. Then it is easy to conclude that the research of review on Outlaws of the Marshes focuses on Jin's version, and seldom talk about Li's version. This thesis focuses on both Li and Jin's version to probe into the developing trend of novel review in Ming and Qing Dynasties, and tries to make contribution to the further study in this field.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Li Zhi's review on Outlaws of the Marshes

In Chinese literature, although novel appeared during Wei and Jin Dynasties, it became mature and reached its zenith in Ming and Qing Dynasties, together with the prosperous of novel review. Most famous reviews of novel are about the four great classical novels, Zhi Yanzhai's review on A Dream in Red Mansions, Mao Zonggang and his son's on The Romance of The Three Kingdoms, and Li Zhi, Ye Zhou and Jin Shengtan's on Outlaws of The Marshes. They views are separate, and

not as systematic as western novel reviews. Most reviews in Ming and Qing Dynasties can be found in novels, which are written casually by readers while reading novels. Those are at page header called "Mei Pi". Some are written in the left and right margins called "Pang Pi"; Others are written in small print called "Jia Pi". Although those reviews are too casual to be systematic, they are about novel theory, the relationship between art and reality, how to shape characters in novel, how to design novel structure, how to deal with the language in novel and so on. Those reviews have a profound impact on novels in Ming and the Qing Dynasties, and still impact readers and novelist nowadays.

Li Zhi, known as Zhuo Wu, advocates the theory of preserving childlike innocence. "childlike innocence means sincerity", "People are born with childlike innocence". The core idea of his philosophy is against Cheng and Zhu neo-confucianism, and call for the liberation of personality. He thinks that all excellent writings should be done out of childlike innocence. He comments on *Outlaws of the Marshes* under the influence of this thought. He combines social criticism with novel review, and uses novel review to publicize his ideological propositions, namely, anti-tradition and anti-taoism. In ancient China, novels and operas have always been regarded as vulgar literature that cannot stand side by side with poems and essay. However, Li Zhi speaks highly of novels. He thinks that *Outlaws of the Marshes* and the *Romance of the West Chamber* are the best novels in the world. In Li Zhi's review of *Outlaws of the Marshes*, his literary theory is summarized into two aspects: excellent writing out of the feeling bitterness and indignation, and similar characters are distinguished by the detail description.

Si Maqian's writes *Historical Records* out of the suppression of his inner desire, and the same with Li Zhi's writing purpose of the review on *Outlaws of the Marshes*. Jin Shengtian has said that all ancient Chinese sages write articles because of the sorrow, anger inside. Without anger and sorrow in heart, there would be no excellent work for reader. *Outlaws of the Marshes* is created out of author's grief and anger in heart [5]. It is easy to say that all excellent writing are created by writers suffering great suppression.

This ideal appears in *Shijing* of the pre-qin Period. For example, Yuan YouTao in Wei Feng said that I was so depressed that I can only sing a song aloud [6], this feeling is not strong enough to be called anger; Qu Yuan, a famous writer of Zhanguo Period, writes *Xisong* because the grief, anger and depression in heart [7]. Si Maqian of Western Han Dynasty put forward the idea that great writing are created on the condition that writer is suppressed to follow his heart, which can be found in his works *Shiji: Tai Shi Gong 's Preface* [8].

Literary critic Liu Xie of Liang Dynasty also says that poem is out of the anger and grievance of poet [9]. Han Yu in Tang Dynasty put forward that writer needs to voice his discontent and oppression in his work [10]. Ouyang Xiu in Song Dynasty describes this creative motive in this way that it is not writing making people poor but all kinds of hardships make good writer [11]. Li Zhi of Ming Dynasty makes further contribution to this ideal, saying that good literary works should not be the result of moaning whinge-bags, but writer's understanding of the true meaning of life after suffering many ups and downs. Writer feels that he can not achieve his dream even after suffering a lot, then he tries to voice all negative emotions in his work. In Li Zhi's eyes', *Outlaws of the Marshes* is his author's understanding of the dark side of his society, including the corruption of officer and the oppression of low class. He records his lament of his society, "the whole society is upside down, and the virtuous are at the bottom, and the wicked at the top which result in a dark society without the idea of seniority. Metaphor up and down the position upside down, regardless of seniority, social darkness corruption".

Li Zhi's review of *Outlaws of the Marshes* is the analysis of characterization. He thinks that why the characters in this novel are so different from each other because the author can depict the unique of each character. *Outlaws of the Marshes* can be said the best work in Chinese Literature due to its success in depicting those excellent characters. Such as Lu Zhishen, Li Kui, Wu Song, Ruan Xiaoqi, Shi Xiu, Hu Yanzhuo, Liu Tang and so on, they are all hot-tempered, but

still different from each other in appearance, experiences, family background, social status. When reader read this novel, it is very easy for them to distinguish one from another [12]. Li Zhi holds that *Outlaws of the Marshes* is skillful in portraying the difference of similar characters. Li Zhi emphasizes that *Outlaws of the Marshes* successfully shape similar characters from different angles, which make reader get to know them easily without the problem of confusion. In Li Zhi's eyes, it is the highest level of novel creation to highlight the special characteristics of those characters in order to achieve the effect of seizing their spirits. Li Zhi once explains the difference between "Hua Gong" and "Zuo Gong" in essay *Zashuo*. "Hua Gong" refers to the product of artificial carving, although exquisite, but artificial. "Hua Gong" refers to the writer seizing the essence of the object by accident, which is wonderful creation of nature, and the highest level of art creation. This level is also the highest aesthetic realm advocated by Zen Buddhism and the Taoist Zhuangzi. The concepts of "Hua Gong" and "Zuo Gong" were originally a generalization of painting art, which is borrowed by Li Zhi to refer to literary creation.

2.2. Jin Shengtan's Review of *Outlaws of the Marshes*

Not long after Li Zhi's review on *Outlaws of the Marshes*, Jin Shengtan gives a more detailed and explicit review on *Outlaws of the Marshes*. Jin Shengtan is also called Cai. He changes his name to Renrui after the destruction of Ming dynasty, and is also called Shengtan. He reviews six books in his lifetime, that is why he is called as "Wets Six Books", and those six books are *Outlaws of the Marshes*, the *Romance of the West Chamber*, the *Poetry of Du Fu*, *Historical Records*, *Lisao* and *Zhuangzi*. Among those reviews, the most important are the review of *Outlaws of the Marshes* and the *Romance of the West Chamber*.

Jin Shengtan attributes the creation of *Outlaws of the Marshes* to author's desire to record the speech and voice of the common people, and this creative motivation is stronger than just voice the anger in author's heart. In the general review of the first chapter of *Outlaws of the Marshes*, Jin Shengtan delivers his comment from Shi Jin's mouth: after the death of Wang Jin, another Shi Jin appears in the book. Shi means history, and unofficial history is also history. Ancient history is used to record state affairs, and what does unofficial history (*Outlaws of the Marshes*) want to record? It records the stories of 108 people. Why does the deeds of 108 people become history? For long time, common people's speech and voice is also history. On the one hand, people dare not to talk about government; on the other hand, there is book *Outlaws of the Marshes* attacking the dark side of social reality, the corruption of the government? Because if the government is fair, and the society is peaceful, then common people will not say anything of the government. Now common people want to talk about social reality, then we know the corruption of the government. It is said in *Outlaws of the Marshes* when Wang Jin dies and Gao Qiu comes [13]. Shi Nian uses common people's voice to call for government's attention, which is his way to attack the dark side of social reality.

Jin sheng-tan put forward that the creative motivation of *Outlaws of the Marshes* is that author wants to voice the strong anger inside, and this creative motivation is stronger than that mentioned by Li Zhi. For example, in chapter six of *Outlaws of the Marshes*, Lin Chong says that a man with special skills still needs to suffer a lot under the bad guys for he can not meet a wise emperor. In one word, Jin Shengtan says that why Shi Naian writes *Outlaws of the Marshes* because he wants to express the anger inside and that is the reason why he calls himself "Naian".

In chapter 14, Ruan Xiaoqi says that now the politicians treat peasants badly, when they go to countryside for a visit, they eat peasants' animal out and let peasant pay to make them leave. Jin shengtan) comments that the author of *Outlaws of the Marshes* writes all the painful things peasants feel for thousand years. In chapter 18, Jin Shengtan says that in the first part the author scolds the politicians in Ruan Shi's words, and criticizes anyone who want to be imperial officials by taking test in Lin Chong's words. All those words are vulgar and get to the point, for the author is full of resentment while shaping those characters in this novel. Si Maqian and Shiji

is inevitable influenced by the strong feeling inside while creating their works, let alone unofficial history, how can we blame Shi Naian(the write of Outlaws of the Marshes)[14]? Jin Shengtan feels that that Outlaws of the Marshes is neither created for leisure nor for maintain the rule of the feudal society, but to criticize and reveal the darkness of the society. The idea that the writer is motivated to write by the feelings of resentment in heart is intenser than the ideal that writer is motivated by the suppression of inner desire, but the later is more emotional.

In the initial stage of the development of novel, people often confuse the novel with historic record due to the lack of definition of the characteristics of novel, and the novel writer treats novel as historic record unconsciously. Jin Shengtan distinguishes novel with historic record, and says that Shiji uses words to record historical facts while Outlaws of the Marshes uses words to create fiction. Historical record can only record those thing that have already happened. But novel creation is another story, because it talks about things that does not happen, then all things is under author's control.[15]245 In his opinion, Shiji records what has happened in history, which means author can only record and can not change what has happened. In historical writing, word is used to record, however, in Outlaws of the Marshes, word is used to create story which gives writer right to image a great deal of character and events. The events in novel may not be the true historical facts, but the writer's imagination based on real life, which is the difference between historical works and literary work. Jin Shengtan holds that novel pay more attention to event, emphasizing that word in novel works for event, which actually requires writers to depict event according to the law of art.

The most outstanding part of Jin Shengtan's review on Outlaws of the Marshes is his theory of characters.. She says that there are 108 characters in Outlaws of the Marshes, each with their own distinct character. Those books without high artistic value, depicting a thousand people without any difference [15]. 245 Those 108 people in Outlaws of the Marshes, each with its own unique, temperament, appearance and language[16]. 252 Jin Shengtan holds that the core of novel creation is to create character with its own characteristics. In his opinion, Outlaws of the Marshes reached a climax in depicting character, which is called "Bai Miao", a common technique in Traditional Chinese Novel. "Bai Miao" refers to the technique which draws out the figures with concise words to create vivid artistic effects. In order to achieve that effect, the most important is to shape characters with difference. Those vivid characters in Outlaws of the Marshes are created by emphasizing their special language and actions.

Jin Shengtan, based on his achievements in the characterization of Outlaws of the Marshes, proposes the requirements for the author further. In his opinion, only does the author has real life experience and a deep understanding of all aspects of life, then he can combining life experience with art creation to create vivid characters in order to write excellent novel. He says that there is no better writer than Outlaws of the Marshes in the world. No novelist in the world is better at writing fiction than Shi Naian who depicts 108 vivid characters with his talent. The reason for his success is that he has been studying matters for many years to gain the essence of matter, thus it is not hard for him to create hundreds or even thousands of characters. [16]252 "Cheng Huai Ge Wu" requires the writer to accumulate life experience, be modest and calm, get rid of all distractions, and think about word carefully, in order to make characters vividly. Jin Shengtan emphasizes that writers must review and study the characteristics and psychology of characters thoroughly base on the understanding of life experience so as to lay a solid foundation for description of the characterization of characters.

3. Conclusin

In term of creative motivation, Jin Shengtan inherited Li Zhi's ideal that novel is created out of the bitterness and indignation inside the writer, and proposes that novel is the record of the speech and voice of common people. As to the shaping of characters, Li Zhi holds that all similar characters can be distinguished by the description of detail. Jin Shengtan put forward that each

character should have its own unique temperament, appearance and language. He not only analyzes the reason for his ideal, but also states the way to achieve this effect; In addition, Jin Shengtan also proposes the differences between historical record and novel, as well as the requirements for writers' cultivation. Jin Shengtan makes a summary of the artistic achievements of *Outlaws of the Marshes* by making comment on *Outlaws of the Marshes*, including detail description, characterization, language and structure. It can be said that the depth and breadth of their theory is unprecedented, lifting ancient Chinese novel review to a new height.

References

- [1] Nianxi Chen: On the Aesthetics Contribution of the Review of Novel in Ming and Qing Dynasty of Chinese classical novels, *Journal of Shanghai Normal University (Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition)*, (1983) No.3, p.70-74.
- [2] Jiangwei Ma: A Study of Narrative Theory about Jin Shengtan's Review in *Outlaws of the Marshes* (MS., Inner Mongolia Normal University, China 2005), p.1-50.
- [3] Lingling Fan: Jin Shengtan's Theory on Writing (MS., Central China Normal University, China 2005), p.1-62.
- [4] Yuanping Ouyang: A Study Summary of Jin Shengtan's Comments on *The Water Margin* in Recent Thirty Years, *Journal of Heze University*, Vol.40(2018), No.4, p.24-28.
- [5] Zhi Li: Preface to *Outlaws of the Marshes* (Shanghai Classics Publishing House, China 2001), p.256
- [6] Shijing (Shanxi Classics Publishing House, China 2003), p.136.
- [7] Yuan Qu: *Xisong* (Liaoning Education Press, China 1997), p.23.
- [8] Maqian Si: *Shiji* (Shanghai Classics Publishing House, China 2001), p.38.
- [9] Xie Liu: Chapter 13 *Qingcai* (Shanghai Classics Publishing House, China 2010), p.154.
- [10] Yu Han: Preface to *Poem Meng Dongye* (Shanghai Classics Publishing House, China 1979), p.125.
- [11] Xiu Ouyang: Preface to *Poetry Mei Raochen* (Shanghai Classics Publishing House, China 1979), p.243.
- [12] Zhi Li: Li Zhi's Review on *Outlaws of the Marshes* (Shanghai Peoples Publishing House, China 1975), p.75.
- [13] Shengtan Jin: *Outlaws of the Marshes* by Shi Naian: Review of Chapter One (China Publishing House, China 1975), p.1.
- [14] Shengtan Jin: *Outlaws of the Marshes* by Shi Naian: Review of Chapter Eighteen (China Publishing House, China 1975), p.75.
- [15] Shengtan Jin: *The Method of Reading The Fifth of Traditional Chinese Masterpiece* (Shanghai Classics Publishing House, China 1979), p.26.
- [16] Shengtan Jin: *Outlaws of the Marshes: The third Preface* (Shanghai Classics Publishing House, China 1979), p.86.