

The Controversy of “Underclass Literature” in Mainland China

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Abstract—The underclass literature (or underclass narration) has occupied an important position in the literary world in mainland China. Since the new century, more and more achievements have been made in the study of "underclass literature". These achievements are either approved or questioned or negative, presenting a complex situation of a hundred schools of thought, which is worth combing.

Keywords—underclass literature; approved; questioning; negative

I. INTRODUCTION

The Chinese mainland's magazine Tianya published an article by Li Yunlei in the first issue of 2008, titled "the rise of 'underclass literature' in the new century". The article argues that "underclass literature is a literary phenomenon that has been discussed since 2004. At first, a group of articles about "the underclass and its expressions" were published in Tianya magazine. Later, literary publications such as Shanghai Literature, Selected Novels and Beijing Literature continued to participate in the discussion. There are also literary publications, such as literary review, literary theory and criticism, and some of the most important theories and literary publications in the country are paying attention to this topic.

So, what is underclass literature? Li Yunlei (2008) believed that the "underclass literature" is mainly literature with the underclass as the object of description. In content, it mainly describes people and things in the underclass; in form, it focuses on realism, but does not exclude artistic innovation and exploration; In terms of writing attitude, it is a serious artistic creation with a reflective and critical attitude towards reality. It has sympathy for the underclass people but can have different ideological resources. Traditionally, it mainly inherits the tradition of the left-wing literature of the 20th century and the literature of democracy and liberalism, but it also integrates new ideas and new creation.

The study of "underclass literature" is often called "underclass narrative". In mainland China, a group of young and new critics took "underclass narration" as a practical literary concept and literary proposition to explain and discuss, and put forward some influential ideas and methods, having published many papers.

These papers and attitudes on the underclass literature can be so various that can be seen as the situation of a hundred

schools of thought. To sum up, there are only three kinds of theories: affirmative, questioning and negative. The so-called affirmative conclusion is to affirm the existence and value of "underclass literature", mainly represented by Li Yunlei, Meng Fanhua, Zhang Yiwu, He Shaojun and so on. The so-called questioning attitude, also known as "frowning attitude", is to be skeptical about whether the "underclass literature" worth such emphasis. Main representatives are Wang Yao, Chen Fumin, Bai Ye, and so on. The so-called negativism is generally not negated from the ontology, but denies, disparages and even denigrates the "underclass literature" from the axiology aspect. Whether positive, doubtful, or negative, these articles either directly state their positions or indirectly make judgments in their methods of argument. The author believes that the importance of controversial contrast and different voices are also good for the development of "underclass literature".

II. AFFIRMATIVE THEORY

Li Yunlei (2006), as a strong supporter of underclass literature, believes that "underclass writing is a new literary trend emerging in recent years, and it appears against the backdrop of pure literary." He did not set foot into big themes such as the construction of the underclass and their self-identity but based on the field of literature to talk about underclass literature. Li Yunlei's speech in utopia on September 16, 2007, "the underclass literature" in the rise of the new century, said "Underclass literature" is not only different from "pure literature" and popular literature, but also different from thematic literature. The mainstream literature whitewashes and rationalizes the order of reality and its unfairness, while the "underclass literature" has a reflective and critical attitude towards reality. It hopes to draw public attention to injustices in order to make changes possible.

Li Yunlei has a basic judgment that since the new century, "the best novels in mainland China are all about the bottom layer. That is to say, the real good fiction we can read is mostly about the underclass." He even felt that "the foundation of a nation is at the underclass. If there is no foundation of the underclass or the underclass has no chance to survive, the country will not develop. Even if it develops, if it has nothing to do with the majority of ordinary people and serves only a small number of upper-middle-class elites, it does not have legitimacy."

It is not only literary critics like Li Yunlei that support the bottom literary, but also many literary publications.

In the article on the development of selected works and contemporary Chinese literature" published in the 2nd issue of literary review in 2013 (by Luo Zhiting), the author believes that "selected works" is conducive to the benign development of "underclass literature". The author concludes that "underclass narration" is a wave of novel trend emerging in recent years. It is written by the disadvantaged groups such as farmers, migrant workers and the poor in cities, reflecting the current social problems such as class differentiation and wealth imbalances in China. Since 2002, the Chinese government has officially acknowledged the existence of "vulnerable groups" and said it should pay attention to social justice and social harmony. With a keen grasp of this trend, the magazine was the first to respond in the field of literature, significantly increasing the strength of the selection of works on the underclass. At the beginning of 2006, the magazine changed its edition and formally put up the banner of "care for the underclass", which became the base camp of advocating the underclass narrative. "Beijing literary novelette monthly" hosted the "literature and the underclass" seminar in April 2006. Driven by the impulse of the magazine, the underclass narrative develops rapidly. Due to the advocacy of the anthology, both inside and outside of the literary world are shocked. The ethical stand and literariness about the "underclass writing" also cause a great debate in the literary world, which itself is conducive to the positive development of the trend.

In the supportive group, some scholars view the "underclass literature" from the perspective of history, analyze the "underclass narrative" in view of history, and seek for ideological resources, aesthetic images, useful reference and important enlightenment for the current "underclass literature".

Gu Si (2007) put forward in *How Does Lu Xun Write the Underclass: Lu xun was the first writer in the history of Chinese literature in the 20th century who consciously devoted himself to the underclass narrative. His introduction of the spiritual orientation of national character transformation, his unique characterization and a series of thoughts surrounding the relationship between the author and the underclass constitute a useful reference and an important inspiration for the current underclass narration in the literary world.* Zhang Lijun's "on the urban underclass narration of Lao she" published in the *Literature Review*, third issue of 2010 said: it is believed that Lu Xun's "underclass of township narration", Lao She's "urban underclass narration" and Zhao Shuli's "rural underclass narration" constitute the landscape of Chinese underclass together.

Some important academic conferences also include "underclass literature" on the agenda, expressing positions of contention.

The 15th annual conference of the international symposium on Chinese literature in the new era and the Chinese contemporary literature society was held in Jinan on October 24, 2008. In the conference speech, Liang Xiangyang combined with the construction of Yan 'an University Lu Yao literature hall to analyze the communication and acceptance of

Lu Yao novels. He pointed out that Lu Yao was a beginner of underclass writing, and his novels could be regarded as inspirational works for rural youth with a strong realistic writing attitude.

In short, "the underclass literary is not only the literary redemption of itself, it is also the literature of redemption. It is the redemption of the oppressed, marginalized, even abandoned bottom group spirit in the blank of time and history and is also a redemption and reflection on social modernity." (Li Long, *the Underclass Literature in the Perspective of Modernity, Wind of Guangdong Sea*, 2008.1).

III. SKEPTICISM

Due to the inability to completely break away from political restrictions and the lack of more effective support and promotion of ideological and theoretical resources, the "development" of the underclass narrative is extremely difficult. One aspect of the controversy is that many scholars and critics are skeptical of the underclass literature. Of course, it is based on the questioning of problem consciousness that is, pointing out some problems to the "underclass literature", which is also the "positive energy" of the "bottom literature". The study of "underclass literature" cannot avoid the voice of "doubt".

Professor Wang Yao, dean of the school of arts at Suzhou University, is a representative of the skeptics. His book *Some Auestions about "Writing at the Underclass"* was influential. The question of whether "the underclass" can be expressed, he argues, is one of the points of divergence. If we think that only the self-narration of the bottom layer can produce pure and real "underclass literary", then we should learn the lesson of "the creation of workers, peasants and soldiers" in that year.

In "Literary review" the 3rd issue in 2014, Bai Ye "the root of literature depends on life" was published, including some judgments. Over the years, he said, short - and medium-length fiction writing, including some novels that have won national literary awards, has been filled with a wide variety of works, such as those about the sufferings at the bottom of the society, those about mysterious crimes, those about the alienation of human feelings and those about the cold war between people. Individually, such works do not seem inappropriate, but after reading too much and linking them together, people will get a cold and gloomy reading experience and taste a kind of disappointment, which leads to a kind of pessimism. This tendency to write, you can't say it's not true or not meaningful, but there's always something missing and superfluous.

Tan Wuchang suggested that enough care should be taken in naming to avoid the "masking" caused by the forced intervention of a concept. Bai Hao put aside the theoretical debate about literature in the new century and discussed the text form of the underclass literature in detail. In his opinion, compared with the great fission of reality and the depth of discussion in the social circle, the writing of underclass literature shows passivity and hysteresis. There are three main flows of consumerism, pan-moralism and new left literature, among which, new left literature points to protest and criticism, showing the normalization, regularity and plainness of suffering.

There are numerous examples. This kind of "nitpicking" as an indirect "questioning" is in line with academic ethics, but there is also a profound need to examine, which can promote the healthy development of "low-level literature".

IV. NEGATIVISM

The voice that negates "the underclass literature" also goes on endlessly. There are direct negation and indirect negation; some deny it theoretically, some criticize it in text analysis, and some even deny, despise and even denigrate it in the "moral" level. It is the direction of literary research to overcome extreme and antagonistic emotions, transcend a single and narrow standpoint and perspective, and move toward the construction of rational and tolerant "gender poetics".

According to Hong Zhigang's article "writing about the underclass only reflects the moralized literary position", he said "underclass writing" implies the non-literary sexual impulse of the creative subject. That is to say, it tries to attract the attention of "social healers" through the display of the miserable fate of these vulnerable groups, so as to enable this group to obtain the real meaning of civil equality and promote the society to be fairness and justice. It is a kind of extreme and unhealthy writing to overstate the moralization.

Li Yun's *Kneading of the Moral Errors in the "Underclass Narrative"* argues that the "underclass narrative" falls into the moral errors. In the author's opinion, "underclass story" has become a popular literary word. It is certainly necessary to focus on the underclass, but it is equally important to understand their problems. In recent years, the popular moralism of the underclass narrative deserves attention. In recent years, the underclass narration is obviously affected by the pan-moral culture and falls into the moral misunderstanding without realizing it.

Yang Zi (2014) almost vilified the underclass literature in her article *Lyricism: Walking on the Road to Literature's Hometown — on the Current Significance of Chi Zijian's Novel Creation*. The article holds that the underclass pleasure Chi Zijian talks about is not the superficial, transient and low-level pleasure that "low-level writing" is fond of talking about but is really soaked in the joys and sorrows of life's warmth and comfort; what she writes about is the misery of the underclass, not the dirty work and hard work that the "underclass writers" often exaggerate. What she shows is the real challenge and the difficulties of life pose to individuals... It is not the popular "writings about the underclass" in recent years that looks at the village workers in the countryside or migrant workers in the city with an unequal view of advantages and disadvantages, which seems that the lower profession is doomed to the exhaustion of seven passions and six desires, and the simple life experience means monotonous likes and dislikes... Therefore, her writing does not exaggerate the brutal war between urban and rural areas as some of the underclass writing. Instead, her writings use the method she used in the book "the Right Bank of the Erguna River", which has insight into the fate and wisdom of the world to ease the burden as an experienced old man.

V. CONCLUSION

The "underclass literature" has occupied an important position in the mainland Chinese literary world. On the other hand, "underclass literature" is not a unique literary phenomenon in contemporary China. It is a kind of intertextuality construction. The "underclass literature" in contemporary China and the underclass narration in world literature constitute a kind of deep intertextuality. In Europe, when capitalism was flourishing, there was no shortage of literary classics telling the "underclass story". Contemporary "underclass literature" in China is a variation and expansion of the pre-text, which forms a rich intertextual relationship with the pre-text and will certainly become an important part of world literature, thus participating in the reconstruction of the global cultural pattern.

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