

## On the Civilian Perspective in Lao She's Novels Before the Founding of the People's Republic

Shijie Tang

School of Humanities, Sichuan University of Light Chemical Technology, Zigong, China.

\* Corresponding Author

### Abstract

The perspective and consciousness of the common people in Lao She's novels have always been paid continuous attention by the academic circle. In this "people's artist", it is easy to see the hearts of ordinary people and see that he has deep compassion and love for them. What we call the "civilian perspective" is not only to observe the social reality from the "civilian" perspective, but more importantly, to observe and describe the values adopted by the author in his creation. When something happens, it contains the value of the civilian Standards of judgment and moral standing are reflected. "Civilian consciousness" is the embodiment of humanistic care spirit, which requires the author to stand on the same side of the described objects and judge them with their eyes. The two are equal. This kind of care is different from the care for the vulnerable groups, which has the meaning of overlooking. Its connotation is closely related to the "civilian literature" advocated by the "New Culture Movement", which can be regarded as the author's subjective reflection of "civilian literature". Lao She is called the "people's artist". From the whole experience of his life and the content of all his works, his value judgment and moral standard are clearly visible. He uses "common sense" to judge things, and reveals his standard value judgment and moral stance on things from "common sense". We carefully investigate the textual characteristics of Lao She's novels, its purpose is to explore the strong sense of common people in Lao She's novels, and take this as the entry point, in order to more deeply understand Lao She's spiritual world and creative world from multiple perspectives. In this paper, first defined the concept of "common people consciousness", revealed its concept and theoretical background, Then through the theoretical background and the practical basis of the formation of Lao She's common consciousness, the development track of the change of common consciousness and its unique status have an important impact on Lao She's creation. From the value evaluation and its impact of two aspects of analysis, it points out that "common people" consciousness. Then through the concrete works to carry on the concrete elaboration. The consciousness of the common people should be sorted out in a clear background. Through the discussion of this paper, based on the specific characters in Lao She's works to analyze the consciousness of the common people, from the perspective of humanistic spirit to understand the writer's care and cry for the image of "common people", and connect it with the real common people.

### Keywords

Lao she; Civilian consciousness; Rickshaw Boy.

### 1. The First Chapter Is The Theoretical Background and Meaning of The Common People Literature

The concept of "civilian literature" first appeared in Chen Duxiu's Literary Revolution. Chen Duxiu's understanding of "civilian literature" was still superficial and empty at that time, but

some achievements were made, which laid a foundation for the subsequent development of civilian literature. However, in Zhou Zuoren's works *Human Literature and Civilian Literature*, the concept of "civilian literature" was more clearly and deeply defined. In Zhou Zuoren's understanding, "universal" and "sincere" are the essence of "civilian literature", which is a higher level than Chen Duxiu. Lao She, on the other hand, believed that literature should reflect the consciousness of ordinary people, and his common understanding benefited from religion. He believed that writers should not be limited to one profession, but should use his words to express the collective consciousness of ordinary people. Lao She also believed that literature should be a kind of action, which should be used to raise society's attention to a certain problem and promote social alerting, so that problems can be more or less solved. As we all know, the concept of religion, whether Buddhism or Christianity, is "equality of all beings", which refers to equality in social status and social psychology. Therefore, Lao She once pointed out in his book *Literature and Carpenters* that "a writer should recognize the status and value of the Five elements and eight works, and should not regard himself as supreme. Trample others on the ground." From this, we can cautiously judge that the sense of "equality" in religion has a great influence on the "common sense" in his creation.

Lao She's definition of ordinary people perspective always contains two meanings: one is to observe and experience life from the perspective of ordinary writers; The other is to describe the life feeling of the lower class from the perspective of ordinary people. Lao She's novels show the social life of China in the 1930s and 1940s from the perspective of ordinary people. He expresses the feelings of ordinary people incisively and vividly, and describes the stories by the way of thinking of ordinary people, reflecting the thoughts and feelings of ordinary people and revealing the state of ordinary social life. His novels emphasize the sadness of ordinary people and reflect the dark reality that nothing can be changed by the power of ordinary people. Among them, the most important theme is to express the miserable living conditions of ordinary people in the city and the tragic and tortuous luck of life. This perspective of ordinary people is reflected in his Beijing-centered literary works, which have unique aesthetic interest and value.

## 2. Second Chapter

### 2.1. The Intrinsic Similarity Between Lao She's Creation and "Common Man Literature"

Social life is extremely realistic, which all reflect its literary character. The writer's personal experience of it determines the appearance of the society he can observe. Lao She was born into a poor family in Beijing in 1899. His father died at an early age and he was dependent on his mother. His poor childhood became the greatest influence in Lao She's life. A person's childhood experience will directly affect the formation of his personality, and the characteristics of his personality will also affect his writing style and emotion, thus determining what kind of writer he is. From the very beginning, he was at the bottom of the society. Material poverty and poor life gave Lao She profound life experience, but also brought him a variety of life forms, which made him more tolerant. It is this unique personality that makes Lao She have a natural affinity and deep sympathy for the common people, and his works present the real life of the common people. There is no tailored imagination of actual life. Lao She brings a concern for the common class into his work, setting the tone for his own sense of the common. Lao She's populist sentiment is not the self-pity of the common people, but internalized into a form of life. The brotherly affinity between Lao She and the common people, like flesh and blood, makes Lao She have stronger emotional power in his creation. This work is also "written in blood and tears", deeply digging out the real feelings of the common people.

In his early years, Lao She had six years of overseas living experience. With the recommendation of his friend Bao Guanglin, he got to know Evans, a British professor who was

teaching in Yenching University at that time. With the recommendation of the professor, Lao She said goodbye to his celibate mother and relatives and embarked on his own lonely journey to a foreign country, Britain. Lao She's experience of living abroad influenced his creation. He not only experienced the life in a foreign country, but also came into contact with Western culture. During his long relationship with the British, he was very dissatisfied with the concept of money first in the western society. He also deeply sympathized with the injustice and suffering of the poor people, believing that this was a society without human care. In addition, the understanding and thinking he gained directly from the life of studying abroad, as well as many Western literary works, had a certain influence on his novel writing and the generation of folk consciousness. He combined Western culture with traditional Chinese culture and expressed Western thoughts in the way of traditional Chinese literature. He was deeply influenced by the works of Western literary masters such as Dickens and Shakespeare, which made him pay more attention to the human concern in literary works. In addition, the works of Conrad and other English writers expanded his literary vision and made him more understanding of literary and artistic solutions, which would be of more help to him in the future art of writing novels. The works of Conrad and other English writers provided him with new perspectives, enabling them to better understand the human concern in literary works, and had a deep influence on his fiction writing art. In addition, Western literary solutions can also help Lao She better express his emotions, better grasp the storylines of his novels and better portray the characters, making his works more authentic and appealing. More importantly, advanced Western cultural concepts have made major breakthroughs in his efforts to change national character, such as his analysis of the mental vulnerability of ordinary people in the context of traditional culture and the revelation of the alienation of human nature, which to some extent also reflect his connection with Western cultural concepts. It also reflects his acceptance and understanding of Western culture. In addition, the humor and banter in his artistic style, although bearing the Manchurian stamp, the economic and spiritual survival experience of the Manchurian people made Lao She pay more attention to the city, and when dealing with the fate of ordinary people, he could not and would not choose subjects unfamiliar to him, such as the figures of princes, nobles and gentry. If there is no recognition of the emotions of ordinary people, there is no flesh and blood connection with them, and only those with experience of folk life can write classic works with folk feelings. Because everyone has his own life experience and survival experience, but can become especially classic writers are still a few.

Although Lao She did not directly participate in the New Culture Movement, he was deeply influenced by it. After all, it was impossible for Lao She to completely break away from the May Fourth Movement. It can be said that it was only under the influence of the May Fourth Movement that Lao She really set foot on the road of literary and artistic creation. This is mentioned in his own works and has been actively discussed by later generations. In this movement, Lao She not only gained recognition for the theory of common people's consciousness, but more importantly, the concept of public opinion consciousness aroused his inner real experience of the life of poverty and a wide range of folk feelings. The emergence of Lao She's works was accomplished under the guidance of this scientific macro theory, and he devoted his whole life to mining the deepening of folk themes and feelings. Unlike the cultural elites at that time, he had a strong sense of social mission and enlightenment consciousness, but Lao She had a more solid and profound folk emotion, which he integrated into his political action and creation career, which is his most attractive personality charm. In his youth, Lao She was exposed to some religious ideas, such as his benevolent attitude, compassion and belief in salvation, which deeply influenced his thoughts and creations throughout his life. It can be said that the strong religious complex promoted the field of public opinion awareness in Lao She's novels. The earliest religion Lao She came into contact with was Buddhism. It was here that he

met his nobleman, Master Zongyue. Master Zong Yue practiced the Buddhist spirit of salvation. He helped Lao She to go to school. His noble behavior also deeply influenced Lao She. Influenced by Master Zong Yue, Lao She was happy and kind all his life, he sympathized with the poor, and after becoming a writer, he put all his emotions on the common people, he directed his creative perspective to the city that was connected with his blood, he sympathized with the poor people of the city and complained about injustice.

Lao She was a faithful believer in Christian teachings, and he translated Bao Guanglin's Christian Cosmopolitanism, which argued that the best way to seek ultimate cosmopolitanism in the world was to follow the principles of obedience, restraint and mercy. This made him more receptive to Christian ideas. The influence of Christian teachings on Lao She was profound. Lao She absorbed the positive ideas of Christianity and used them to find an outlet for Chinese social thought. He believed that the excellent teachings of Christianity were an important guiding light in his life, which could help him out of difficulties and enable him to make a difference.

## **2.2. Shaping The Image of The Common People**

Lao She created a complete and vivid urban scenery of the middle and lower society with the image of the common people, and the description of customs closely related to the common people is more authentic. Several of his early novels were written in England, and most of them were snippets of the lives of the poor in Beijing. But in the 1930s and 1940s, at the height of his fiction, his novels were mainly about the social lives of the poor in the middle and lower classes, including their families, occupations, religious beliefs, values, and so on. From his works, we can see that he objectively described the material and spiritual world of the characters, and inferred their understanding of life from the point of view of each character, showing the common spirit of everyone simply, sincerely, truly and profoundly. From the perspective of realism, Lao She created a variety of character images. "In modern Chinese novels, the richness and vividness of the civilian image provided by Lao She is almost unmatched in the history of modern Chinese novels." Lao She's writings make his characters vivid and simple, showing not only the spirit of the common people from the perspective of the common people, but also their lives and destinies.

Lao She's most successful civilian image is the "old-school citizen". Mr. Wen Rumin once said, "Lao She writes best of the old-style citizens, who are city people but still subjects of 'rural' China. They bear the heavy burden of feudal paternalism, and their attitude and way of life are very 'old school', very conservative and closed.

Lao She's works not only record a complete world of the common people, but also awaken people's observation of traditional culture, so as to reflect on some of the dross of traditional culture, and reveal the psychopathy of the characters with its touching words and dramatic exaggeration. We find that most of the works written by Lao She are about urban civilians living at the bottom of the class, whose careers are unstable and life is difficult. His understanding, tolerance and sorrow for ordinary people reflect his sincere love for ordinary people. It can be said that Lao She comprehensively and profoundly records and describes a complete world of ordinary people, leaving precious spiritual wealth for The Times. He uses artistic techniques acceptable and understood by ordinary people to resonate with readers, and at the same time can not help but make them think. Arousing people's attention to the common people.

## **3. The Third Chapter From Specific Works Lao She's Novels From The Civilian Perspective**

Lao She's first work is Lao Zhang's Philosophy, which was carefully written while he was teaching at Oriental College, University of London. "Lao Zhang's Philosophy" describes the way of life and the living situation of a ruffian and rascals Lao Zhang. It focuses on depicting the bad

habits of ordinary citizens, especially the sharp mockery of the "gold standard" thought. This work through the life of different classes of citizens with the same character, such as Lao Zhang and Zhao Si. It reflects the real face of Chinese society from the 1911 Revolution to the 1920s. Although the feudal monarchy has been overthrown, its "broken arms" still lie on the ground. We have yet to fundamentally solve the problem, and we need to clear away these "broken walls" so that China can get rid of the shackles of feudalism and imperialism.

Lao Zhang's Philosophy is an important work, in which Lao She reveals the lower part of the city that he knows best, allowing people to see with their own eyes the real flesh and blood of the society. Compared with many other works of the same period, it depicts the ordinary world unexpectedly, and its humorous technique is far more mature than ordinary works, and it has a unique style and charm. Through a deep understanding of the relationship between man and nature, it provides us with valuable insights into life and realistic truths. Hence, Lao Zhang's Philosophy stands out from other works of its time. Nevertheless, we should also realize that in this work, he has not grasped some essential characteristics of civil society. Therefore, by starting with the phenomenon of "knowing smile" from the perspective of the civilian population, he reveals the social reality of the time, and we have a deeper understanding of civil society and its people, as well as the social conditions that shaped them. His work also reveals the complex relationship between people and their environment, helping us to better understand the world around us. Inheriting and developing the artistic style of Lao Zhang's Philosophy, Zhao Ziyue is Lao She's second work and also again embodies his sense of common people. From an artistic point of view, Zhao Zi Yue may be no better than Lao Zhang Philosophy is much better. The character image is no more lifelike than the former. However, if "Zhao Ziyue" has irreplaceable value as "Lao Zhang's philosophy", then it is an assessment of the value of the May Fourth Movement, offering us a unique perspective. Because Lao She did not personally participate in the May 4th Movement, he observed the whole movement from the perspective of a bystander, which enabled him to see the advantages of the movement but also clearly aware of its shortcomings. This is also the difference between his perspective and that of other writers, which is more objective and real. Perhaps there are some subjective factors involved, but more importantly, from the perspective of the common people, his views may be more It's closer to what the ordinary people of that time thought about the May 4th Movement and its products. When talking about his novel Zhao Zi Yue, Lao She said, "My standing outside the May 4th Movement has caused my mind to suffer a great loss. Zhao Zi Yue is a clear proof that it does not encourage but scratches the itching flesh of the new characters." From this, it can be concluded that Lao She's civilian perspective and its value tendency are the perspective and value tendency of ordinary people. It has a very high practical significance Lao She was a true humanitarian, which showed that he would sympathize with the oppressed and oppose the oppressor.

When the two were opposed, Lao She would stand on the side of the oppressed without hesitation. The reason may be that he is a born "civilian", he has a heart of equality and universal love, in the face of some helpless things, in his works always try to be tolerant. For example, in "Four Generations Under One Roof", when Big Chabao was arrested and his home was sealed, Guan Xiaohe moved to No. 6 yard, the whole alley people are very hostile to him, but also did not make any excessive behavior, just did not talk with him. Lao She thinks it's enough to treat him with cold indifference! When they learned that Japan surrendered, Fang Liu and others wanted to give the Japanese old woman a little taste, and Lao She sent Rui Xuan to stand up and show his deep thinking and extraordinary emotion in the face of the Japanese people. From the perspective of civilians, the civilians who personally experienced the war are victims. This kind of love goes beyond humanitarianism and has high humanistic feelings! The love for the common people is also deeply reflected in many literary works that we pay attention to, and

the emotional fields reflected by Lao She from the perspective of the common people all show Lao She's more tolerant and broad mind! It reflects the truth of his creative thoughts.

Lao She once expressed his creative thoughts: "First of all, I saw in the revolutionary texts at that time, the content is often not full, the characters are not vivid enough, and the number of slogans is countless."

This also shows that Lao She attaches great importance to the authenticity of his creative thoughts. Both the starting point of his autobiography and the pursuit of his novel creation are realized with a real attitude and sincere creation. Being able to remain so authentically original reflects the true principles of his writing, as well as his "sincere" quality. Lao She's creation gives people a deep and sincere feeling from beginning to end. And "Big Brother Zhang" in *Divorce* is another improvement in Lao She's writing. The building of the image of Zhang Big Brother, Zhang Big Brother is a conformist, content to accept the fate of the citizens, he thinks that contradictions can be reconciled, life just make do, he is cautious to keep his own think of comfortable Zhang Big Brother really wrote the citizens of this kind of "good scar forget pain", blind optimism, no matter what to "treat" still to help others, the civilian distress to comply with the nature of the nature of the living state described incisively and vividly, because of this they are also high-risk groups in the society, can not withstand many changes, can not seek more progress. Lao She's criticism of this kind of citizens and their psychology is quite obvious here. Even in today's society, there are many people who do not seek progress, let alone at that time. From his point of view, we can see that the dark old society, the common customs and customs, and the filthy local official institutions are connected, reflecting the "cells" of the whole society at that time. Compared with "Lao Zhang" in "Lao Zhang's Philosophy", Zhang Brother is more vivid and vivid. Elder Brother Zhang has a richer character, which not only has national color and taste of ordinary citizens, but also connects the work with the broader social reality, reflecting Lao She's more careful observation and more profound thinking of the common people. He always soberly excavates the ideological significance of the characters and shows the real human nature. Therefore, the characters in his novels are not only novel characters, but also have universal and typical significance. He no longer limits himself to exposure or criticism, but turns to thinking about the social roots that shape his characters and their fates. It is the appearance of "divorce" that reveals Lao She's artistic expression to a higher level, thus presenting more details of life from the perspective of ordinary people, which makes people feel nothing different at first sight and taste endlessly.

"Camel Xiangzi" is Lao She's most successful work, and also the most important result of his observation and reflection from the perspective of the common people. Influenced by Chinese classical novels and folk, Lao She inherited the tradition while absorbing the essence of the narrative mode of western novels, and organically combined the two, making it a form of expression for Lao She to cater to and enhance the appreciation interest of ordinary citizens. The consciousness and perspective of the common people are perfectly reflected in his works. He starts from his own life experience, starts from the aesthetic needs of the common people, and uses the narrative style accepted by the common people to convey his ideas, which is obviously different from other writers. Lu Xun also described the image of rickshaw pullers, but he only expressed his concern from the surface of humanity, but did not really go into the actual life of the pullers, do not know their specific difficulties. He only viewed from the passenger's perspective and described the passenger's feelings. He only showed the moral qualities of poverty and diligence common to the toiling masses, focusing on expressing his own feelings. In other works, not to mention, the civic class is just as much a component as any other component of Chinese society. In *Camel Xiangzi*, Lao She explores the social roots that led to Xiangzi's decline, showing a considerable degree of disgust and criticism, but he does not ruthlessly criticize Xiangzi's own reasons. He defends Xiangzi's selfishness by saying that poor people can only decide whether to love with money. Lao She's kindness also shows that he will

not arrange the end of the bad guy brutally. For example, Lao She defends his younger brother who has become a spy: "When the Japanese come to Peiping, such strange things will happen. This kind of broad thought of tolerance, all reflects Lao She's deep love for the common people, which is matched with our previous argument.

The character Xiangzi is the most tolerant in Lao She's works, which is the warmth of a father to his son. Lao She can only wait for Xiangzi to become a callous son, and then disappointingly enumerates all the things that Xiangzi seems by this time not to be. The bad ones had already existed. This kind of intolerance is what Lao She wanted to express through his own folk consciousness. The real reason may be that he could not bear to criticize such an ordinary person any more. Xiangzi, as an urban civilian, could not find a real way out in such a dark social reality. Therefore, *Camel Xiangzi* is a masterpiece of Lao She's common people consciousness and the most important achievement in his creation. Here, Lao She's attitude towards *Camel Xiangzi* and the urban poor reflects his concern and sympathy for them beyond the past, and reflects the maturity of his civilian consciousness. He also puts more energy into this work, exploring the collective fate of the common people and the relationship between individuals.

Yes, in "*Camel Xiangzi*," society is a dark place, not just one level or one corner of darkness, but the darkness of the whole society. The fate of many charioteers, whether selfish or collective, cannot find a real way out, and there are various dark realities even within the structure of the common society itself. Due to the development of the society at that time, the gap between the rich and the poor became wider and wider, and there were many unfair phenomena in the society. Many poor people could only immerse themselves in this darkness and could not get out. Lao She's works, however, express this dark social reality, arouse people's sense of responsibility and compassion, and make more people pay attention to and reflect on this social phenomenon. Lao She's works are fundamentally different from the popular literary works that exaggerate the collective power of the masses at that time. His strong sympathy for and familiarity with the common people make him easy to describe the common people, and he integrates this emotion into his works. Therefore, Lao She's description and creation of the civil class have strong authenticity and soreness. His works are to those who exaggerate the collective moral power. A valuable addition to the volume of revolutionary literature.

#### **4. Chapter four is the literary value of Lao She's novels' common people consciousness**

The common consciousness in Lao She's novels is of unique value. The perspective of his works is that of ordinary people, rather than abstract concepts such as politics and class being imposed on "the people", and he is always in the context of a particular society, with scenes showing the characters' fates and their personalities. Lao She's physical experience brought him closer to the common people, and he always wrote immersed in the culture of the common people, rather than detached from it. In his novels, he is that common man, and he and the characters in his works are intermingled with each other, with a strong sense of sight. Because of his strong sense of the common people, Lao She became one of the most outstanding folk culture singers and critics in the history of modern Chinese literature. In the history of modern Chinese literature, the rich and vivid civilian characters created by Lao She are unmatched by other writers. Lao She's civilian consciousness enriched the territory of Chinese modern literature, broadened the subject matter of modern literature, and won a place for the citizen subject matter in the history of modern literature. Lao She's civilian novels expanded the subject matter of modern literature and made city literature stride forward deeply. Lao She likes to describe the traditional urban lifestyle and concept of life, rather than the modern and fast pace of urban life. He pays attention to the description of the declining urban human conditions and perspective of the city from the perspective of the common people. His creation focus is on the

bottom of the city, the common people who are struggling for life and struggling for the fate. It is that strong sense of common people that gives Lao She's works a unique artistic charm and makes Lao She a master of Chinese modern and contemporary literature.

When it comes to Lao She's common sense and literary contribution, we have to talk about the "Beijing flavor" revealed in his works. The "Beijing flavor" revealed in his works is actually a highly regional literary style, which is the main way of Lao She to express the common sense. The "Beijing complex" in Lao She's works is the first manifestation of this kind of civilian consciousness. The significance of Lao She's "Beijing complex" is not only in its pure geographical aspect, but also reflects his concern and love for the secular life and ordinary people. It can be said that for Beijingers and northerners, Lao She's works are full of vitality describing the local customs of Beijing. Lao She makes the Beijing style literature into a recognizable literary landscape, which makes the folk literature seem more unique. In the history of Chinese literature, no one has been able to tap into the profound influence of regional culture like Lao She. He tried his best to explore the expression forms of this regional culture in different historical situations. This exploration gives his works a unique charm and makes him a master of modern and contemporary Chinese literature. Conclusion There is no doubt that Lao She's novels for the sincere feelings of the middle and lower class citizens make us surprised. He has been practicing the mentality of a civilian in his life, with the perspective and vision of the civilian view of social life, feel the joys and sorrows of life, hardships and hardships, perhaps we can say that he is a civilian who happens to be able to write. Although it is a good thing for Lao She to go deep and far in the exploration and exploration of the common people's consciousness, we should also see that in essence, it also makes him trapped in the work, which makes him unable to detangle himself from his works and relate to the broader social reality, so the penetration of his articles cannot be compared with Lu Xun. However, this deficiency can also be regarded as Lao She's unique artistic style, which makes him indeed become a spokesperson for the common people in the society. Thanks to Lao She's civilian literary novels, the creation of better continuation and development.

## References

- [1] Lao She and Chinese Cultural Concepts, Song Yongyi, Xuelin Publishing House, 1988.
- [2] Lao She's Self-Description of an Ordinary Man's Ordinary Life Report, edited by Yan Huandong, Shanxi Education Press, 2001.
- [3] People's Artist Lao She, Liu Ming, Shi Xingze, Shandong Pictorial Publishing House, 2001.
- [4] Lao She on Creation, by Lao She, Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1985.
- [5] Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature, Qian Liqun, Wu Fuhui et al., Peking University Press, 1998.