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IMAGE OF JAPAN IN CHINESE LITERARY THOUGHT IN THE
EARLY 20TH CENTURY

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Abstract

Creative work by Yu Dafu reflected several important periods of Chinese public consciousness development: from the Movement on the 4th of May till the end of the anti-Japanese opposition war. At the beginning of the 20-th in the XXth century under the influence of revolutionary ideas most Chinese writers consider literary works and their talent as revolutionary arms. By that time, Japan had won in the Russian-Japan war, had successfully won in the First World War; its power booms, Japanese continue expansion into Asia continues. The novel collection “Chen Lun” (“Sinking”) by Yu Dafu consists of three short stories based on the personal experience of the author and connected with different stages of his foreign education. The novel collection by Yu Dafu has not only reflected personal experience of the writer of visiting this wonderful country but expressed his striving to extrapolate artistic reception of Japan and Japanese onto the images of self-perception of China and the Chinese. Country-specific observations of Yu Dafu disclose a modern Chinese reader the most interesting features of life in traditional Japan, express nuances of gender dimension in the Japanese society, determine correlations in behavioral attitudes of Japanese and Chinese women, disclose the bases of Japanese esthetics. The image of Chinese sinking in their complexes and doubts, trying to break free of erotic temptations and social mirages of Japanese life were expressed in the concept-title “Sinking” and reflected all the ambiguities of the ethnic consciousness of the Chinese during that period.

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Keywords: Japan, Chinese literature, Literary images of Japan, Japanese perception, Yu Dafu



1. Introduction

The material for study was a novel collection by Yu Dafu “Sinking” (1921), written during the period of the writer’s foreign education.

Yu Dafu (real name – Yu Wen) was born in Fuyang city (Zhejiang province) in 1896. In 1911 he started writing and publishing poems in magazines, written according to the rules of the traditional Chinese poetry. In 1913 Yu Dafu went to Japan together with his brother Yu Hua to enter the university. This time is a start for his literary career.

He will spend nine years in Japan – the most important for his development as a man and a writer. In 1914 Yu Dafu was admitted to the preparatory division of the medical department in Tokyo university, in 1915 after graduation he entered the medical department of Nagoya higher educational establishment № 8 (today Nagoya university). In 1916 Yu Dafu (Fig. 01) translates to the Law department in Nagoya university, in 1919 after graduating, he enters the economic department of Tokyo Imperial University (today Tokyo university). In 1922 he receives the Master of Economy degree and returns to China. As a result he studied Japanese language and culture perfectly (Li, 2013).

In July 1921 there appears the first collection of stories by the writer –沉沦 “Chen Lun” (“Sinking”), which had a great impact on the contemporary Chinese literature, which appears and develops in these years (Chen, 2011).

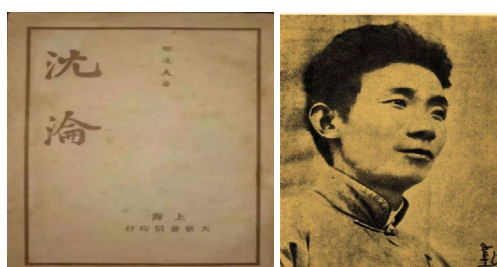


Figure 1. Yu Dafu and his collection of stories “Sinking”

2. Problem Statement

The research is based on the problem of Japan and Japanese perception by the Chinese during the first decades of the XX century on the material of the collection of stories by Yu Dafu “Chen Lun” (“Sinking”).

3. Research Questions

The ways of creating percept images in literature, Japan and Japanese perception from the point of view of the Chinese ethnic consciousness during the development of the Chinese republic, the image of the Chinese self-perception in the early XX century, the specifics of literature development the “Left Wing” in China.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the work is to determine the percept image of Japan and Japanese in the Chinese literature in early 20-th of the XX century on the material of the novel collection by Yu Dafu “Chen Lun” (“Sinking”), which is oriented at the socialistic transformations.

5. Research Methods

The research uses cultural-historical, comparative-historical, typological, biographic, structural-semantic, translational methods.

6. Findings

The novel collection “Sinking” by Yu Dafu consists of three short stories, based on the author’s personal experience in his learning Japan. The stories follow the sequence of characters’ growing-up and their consciousness development: “Sinking” (the same title as that of the novel collection), “Migration to the South”, “Silver-grey death”. “Silver-grey death” was written first but, the main character in it is older than the characters of other stories, that is why, it is the last in the novel collection. Different types of main characters correspond to different stages of author’s foreign education: the story “Sinking” tells the story of a Chinese student at the preparatory course in Japan; “Migration to the South” tells about Chinese students at the Japan university, “Silver-grey death” tells about a Chinese graduate from the Japan University working in Japan.

“Sinking” is a story of a gradual learning of Japan and the Japanese at early XXth century by a young Chinese. The article has three themes of creating the image of perceiving the “foreign” – foreign culture and its people reflected in the collection of works by Yu Dafu: the percept image of settlements (city/village), the percept images of people (Japanese men and women).

6.1. The images of Japanese towns

China at early XX century was a state getting out of the burden of the Middle Ages. It was a closed China with centuries’ long traditional way of life, dominating peasant culture and underdeveloped economy. No doubt, Japan was for the Chinese of that time a modern industrial country. Since the mid XIX century to the early XX century most Chinese youth went to Japan to study Japanese industry and politics. Japan became the best model for China reformation. For example, Chen Dusyu, one of the main founders of the Communist Party and the leader of the early Communist Party went to Japan to study five times since 1901 till 1915. After returning to China in 1915 he organized workers’ meeting in Shanghai. In 1915 Chen Dusyu set up a magazine “New Youth”. Publications in this magazine touched on a wide range of political, social, scientific and cultural issues and became a horn of “The movement for a new culture”. Later Chen Dusyu set up such periodicals as “The labour circle” and “A colleague”, which were engaged in propaganda of Marxism among the workers.

Besides “New Youth” different works on economy and social structure are released in China during this period, for example, translations “Neodoxy on human rights” Hiroyuki (1903); “Evolutionism on morality and rights” (Hiroyuki, 1911), “Socialistic essence” by Cinde (1906).

Thus, the Chinese tried to modernize their country following the experience of Japan as a developed industrial country with a developed social structure. Japan cities were different from Chinese ones being an example of modernization. However, in the novel collection “Sinking” the author turns to the image not of the “modernized” but rural, quiet and idyllic Japan – sung of in literature and art. The main people of the three stories, being different in characters, have one thing in common – they do not want to live in the modern cities. The character in the story “Sinking” lives in the family hotel in the city N. (following the author’s biography, N means Nagoya): “Now, I am in village N. The hotel where I live has no neighbor houses, only rice fields around and a pond in the Western part of the hotel... It is dark everywhere in the evening. Nothing can be seen” (Yu, 2011). Such a description of a distant Japanese village, dark nights is not seriously different from the description of a Chinese village. In the story “Migration to the South” the main character is having rest on Bosa peninsula: Multi-layered sea waves, blue sky, warm weather, soft gentle hills, fishing nets spotted along the peninsula shore and villagers make beautiful pictures which allow forgetting that I am in a foreign country. I will say in English: Hospitable, inviting dreamland of the romantic age (Yu, 2016).

In these two stories the author describes rural landscapes, sceneries, which create a utopian percept image of Japan as an ideal country. This pastoral image of the contemporary Japan was intentionally created by author for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, this image of the foreign land helped soothing author’s home-sickness. Yu Dafu is a small Chinese town on the Fuchun in Zhejiang province, similar to Boso peninsular. During the studies in Japan, huge educational load, other society and difference in ethnoses made the author home-sick. That is why he described Japan rural area, not a modern city.

Secondly, this image compensated his feeling of national inferiority. Yu Dafu repeatedly tells about his pique, that he felt as a Chinese to Japanese.

The process of fast modernization in Japan and Japan cities in the stories by Yu Dafu is described via inner monologues of Chinese characters: In 1915 industry here was underdeveloped; there was an endless prairie close to town N. The population grew slower than now. Everything has changed, now there is a modern, densely-populated city N (Yu, 2016). It is characteristic that the character speculates about Nagoya. During 1915–1920 (the story “Sinking”, evidently was written in 1920) the population in Nagoya grew in jerks, the boundaries of the city spread and it became more modern. However, Nagoya was not a center of the industrial development in Japan, while other cities, such as Tokyo were more prospering. Encountering economic and industrial boom in a foreign country, a young Chinese tries to avoid describing its economic growth and power.

6.2. Images of Japanese men

Images of Japanese are few and undisclosed. At first, Yu (2016) creates a percept image in a traditional way, stressing anthropological differences of the Chinese and Japanese in comparative descriptions: “A lean young man, in the mid-twentieth, five “chi” and five “tsun” (183 cm). We understand at once that he is a Chinese as there are no such people among the Japanese”. The features “tall figure and a slimmer body” are the distinctive feature of the Chinese. The Japanese are shorter, more stout and stronger. Further, the author turns to the characteristic features. In the stories of the collection “Sinking” the Japanese men are assured, arrogant, treat the Chinese with indignity, and ignore them: “At

the end of the lesson his Japanese classmates told jokes and talked to each other, as sparrows twitter and he was the only one who kept silent". Or: "When his classmates laughed loudly, he always thought that they were laughing at him and turned red immediately" (Yu, 2011). The basic reason for such behaviour is a position of a Chinese student abroad. A strong and assured image of a Japanese man (by a Chinese perception) contradicts sharply to the image of a Chinese man with a low self-estimation (self-perception image). This ethno psychological collision deepens author's disgust (and characters' one) to Japanese men. For example, a character meets Japanese school-girls with three Japanese schoolmates, who are chatting with each other. The main character depreciating him is so indecisive that he cannot look at the girls: "Suddenly, two school-girls in red skirts passed by. He studied in a boys-school and has never seen school-girls so close, that is why, he was nervous, breathed more often. His three classmates shouted loudly to the girls: "Where are you going?" Two girls answered shyly: "We don't know..." The Japanese students laughed loudly and were proud of themselves. He was the only one who kept silent and swore himself: You are so shy! Can't you talk to them? What have you ever done?... Because I am a Chinese, perhaps, they do not want to look at me and don't want to talk to me (Yu, 2011). A violent contrast of the character in comparison with the Japanese coevals is redoubled by the correlation with the women's characters.

The percept images of Japanese men are represented in the story "Migration to the South" on the example of students K. and V., one of few Japanese friends of the main character. A character of V. is a young student, funny and talkative. He and K. meet the main character I. Zhen in an Orthodox church. However, when they start talking with the main character about religion, they show scorn and hostility to China and the Chinese: "We are Japanese Empire...", "China, which only creates discords..." (Yu, 2016). Student K. affronts the main character: "His belief? It is false! He believes in Christianity, may be because he wants to learn several foreign languages or talk to Japanese school-girls!" I. Zhen turned red immediately. Evidently, K. Said so to make fun of him" (Yu, 2016). This scene shows scorn and hostility of the Japanese men to the Chinese. K. character is a Japanese student and he loves foreign religions and cultures, becoming a fanatical believer in the Orthodox church. For example: "K. said to I. Zhen: "Let us pray!" and went down on his knees immediately. He continuously told the words for himself: "Father God, Holy Father and so on" (Yu, 2016). These details should show to the reader that the Japanese pay a lot of attention to the developed European culture, perceiving Christianity as a sign of this culture and accustoming it in imitation. To show his commitment to Christianity, K. often immediately goes down on to his knees and prays in English with a Japanese accent.

Herewith, the perception of Japanese in the literary space of the collection of stories is changing as the main character grows up; his language and social status improve. Successes of Chinese characters change the relation of Japanese coevals; moreover, among the Japanese young men there appear character's followers: "When I. Zhen lecture was over, the audience stood up and started applauding him. Some came up to him to shake hands and talk to him.

Student V. said to I. Zhen: "Socialism that you preach, perceiving the rich as enemies, respect to the poor will not make the country prosper and powerful. I am absolutely against socialism". Other Japanese young man stood up and objected: "Sufferings of our working class are due to such capitalistic flunkies as you!" "Nipple head! What nonsense!" V. and a Japanese young man argued" (Yu, 2016).

In the novel collection the social position of the main character improves due to this his perception of Japanese men is changing. In the story “Migration to the South” we see not only Japanese students who are hostile to the Chinese but also Japanese young men who support the ideas of the main character. Changes in the percept image of the Japanese men also disclose the main idea, which the author wants to share with the Chinese public: first you should strengthen your position to get approval of others. So, the percept image of the Japanese in the novel collection “Sinking” on the whole is simple, static, stereotyped. From the characteristics of a Japan man we distinguished the main:

- arrogance and contempt for China and the Chinese (chauvinism),
- assuredness,
- striving to learn “leading” as they think foreign ideas and traditions.

Thanks to these qualities Japanese men take leading positions in the society and become the main representatives of this society. Hence, the relations between Japanese men characters and the main character in the novel collection in a literary form becomes a projection of the relations between Japan and China in early XX century.

6.3. The percept image of a Japanese woman

The percept images of Japanese women correlate with the percept images of Japanese men. The Japanese woman’s image created by Yu. Dafu is idealized. We see different descriptions of the Japanese women in the collection of stories. They are young school-girls, daughters of landlords in the story “Sinking”; a school-girl O., a landlady M, a maid in the pub (“Migration to the South”); the wife of the main character, a host of the pub Jing Er (“Silver grey death”). When the author describes women characters he –describes their advantages in details not noticing disadvantages. For example, the description of the landlord daughter (“Sinking”): “The daughter of the hotel owner has turned seventeen this year. She has very big eyes. When she smiles two beautiful dimples appear on her cheeks. It is so nice! So beautiful! I love her very much but always pretend indifferent” (Yu, 2011). In the story “Silver-grey death” Yu Dafu describes the host of the Japan pub Jing Er, a fragile sympathizing girl: “Jing Er is 20 this year. She has a common appearance, but her eyes are like lakes, and her nose is as straight as a Caucasian one. I don’t know why, but I will never forget her. Jing Er always understands me, every time I am sad, she is sad either” (Yu, 2011). These women are not only good-looking, fragile, nice and sympathizing but give moral support to the main character in a foreign country.

Chinese characters in the stories by Yu. Dafu perceive a woman as a moral support, trying to tell them their sufferings and to find love and support. When a character encounters scorn and hostility of Japanese men and writhe under his inferiority, Japanese women are his moral support. On the other hand, Yu Dafu turns reader’s attention to the sexual attractiveness of Japanese women – coquettish, attractive, for a young emigrant man. For example, a waitress in a Japanese pub: “What a surprise! A Japanese maid never wears pants, only a short apron; the woman put long, long-sleeved clothes over her apron and tightened it with a belt. As she was walking, her apron swung and I could see her plump white thighs... At the same time a unique smell of Japanese women reached my nose” (Yu, 2011). Kimono is traditional Japanese clothes, and Japanese society has not tabooed sex contrary to the Chinese one, that is why Japanese women can wear kimono and change clothes in front of other people. This description is given in the story “Migration to the South”: “When the landlady M washed she took off her clothes, laying

chest and nipples bare. I. Zhen was tempted by her naked body every day” (Yu, 2016). Japanese women personify tenderness and compassion and so on and at the same time they show their exposure to sexual relations.

7. Conclusion

A Japan and Japanese percept image, created by Yu Dafu, who lived and studied there for a long time, is characterized by his striving to reflect his perception of the foreign culture and its people objectively. Cross-cultural observations by Yu Dafu show the Chinese reader the most interesting details of the life in a traditional Japan, express peculiarities of gender dimensions of the Japanese society, show correlations in the behaviour of Japanese and Chinese women, reveal the bases of Japanese aesthetics. The feeling of the insulted national consciousness, felt by the characters, as the author thinks, is a result of inferiority of the domestic policy of that Chinese government: “Do your countrymen suffered less without cause under the power of the Chinese bureaucracy, then poor Japanese? Japanese workers – their life is always safe. And if Chinese countrymen go against the government they will be killed. People who were robbers are now officers, can rape our women and daughters and kill them calmly” (Yu, 2016). However, the feeling of national humiliation comparing to the more developed at that moment Japan forms in the author not only positive social frames (feeling of admiration, striving to adopt better images of Japanese culture), but also a negative attitude, mostly acquitted by the chauvinism of Japanese relative to the Chinese. These tenets are disclosed on the percept images of Japanese men and self-percept images of the Chinese characters. That is why, Chinese characters fell “sinking” in their own doubts, weak points and complexes. They should find inner power to get off the morass of the sexual, social temptations to build a new life in China.

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