

# On the Writing of Chinese Traditional Culture in Lau Shaw's Novels

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## Abstract

As an important writer in the 20th century, Lau Shaw pays attention to Chinese traditional culture in his novel creation and makes in-depth thinking. This thesis mainly studies the diversified existence of Chinese traditional cultural factors in Lau Shaw's novels, and explores how material and technical culture, conceptual culture and social ecological culture are rich and concrete in his novels. From Lau Shaw's novel creation, we can see that his attitude towards Chinese traditional culture is very complex, and he is also a little confused about how to inherit and develop traditional culture. However, Lau Shaw's thinking about traditional culture is very valuable and of great significance to how we inherit and develop Chinese traditional culture.

## Keywords

Lau Shaw's novels, Chinese traditional culture, cultural types, reflection.

## 1. Introduction

When reading Lau Shaw's novels, I noticed that there are many descriptions of traditional culture in his novels. His pain and confusion are revealed through his descriptions, giving people a sense of anxiety, but there are many parts that praise traditional culture. This kind of complex emotions together constitute the content of his novels, and I am interested in this phenomenon in it. This thesis aims to explore the traditional cultural connotation in Lau Shaw's novels. Chinese traditional culture is the spiritual foundation for the survival of the Chinese nation. Paying attention to Lao She's thinking about the old and new cultures will not only help to deepen the research on Lau Shaw and his works, but also provide beneficial enlightenment for strengthening the confidence of Chinese culture and inheriting and carrying forward the excellent Chinese traditional culture.

## 2. Description of Material and Skill-based Culture

### 2.1. Material Culture: the Yellow Storm and Siheyuan, Etc.

"Material culture refers to all the material objects on which human beings have been and are acting on it, human material lifestyles, and material products that embody human labor." [1] Material products are the most essential content of material culture, mainly including food, clothing, architecture, transportation, etc.

This kind of material culture has been repeatedly described by Lau Shaw, such as the siheyuan in *The Yellow Storm*, and the costumes in *The Spear of Breaking Heart*. "Siheyuan is one of the traditional courtyard houses in China. Its layout is characterized by the courtyard as the center, and the main rooms, houses and kitchens are arranged on the four sides of the courtyard. Generally, the doors and windows open to the courtyard without opening windows to the outside. It takes the Beijing Siheyuan as a typical example. It is usually divided into the front

and inner courtyards, and a flower gate is set between the two courtyards. The inner courtyard is the center of the house. On the central axis, the main room is in the south, the Daozuo room is in the north, and the wing rooms are on both sides. Large houses can consist of multiple courtyards. "[2]In people's impression, the courtyards are square and neat, but in *The Yellow Storm*, only the third courtyard of Guans is the most "complete". First of all, there is a shadow wall at the door of the Guans. The shadow wall is the wall facing the gate as a barrier outside the door, which is not available in other homes; Secondly, the courtyard of the Guans has a neat layout and is a complete siheyuan, but Qi's siheyuan is narrow from east to west and long from north to south; Finally, the gatehouse of Guans is Qingshui ridge, which is the most exquisite, labor-consuming and cost-effective door in civilian courtyards. The Qi's courtyard is also one described by Lau Shaw. Qi's courtyard is long from east to west and short from north to south, so the north and South houses cannot be opposite. The south house is close to the street gate, the north house faces the South courtyard wall, the east house is at the end of the courtyard, and many flowers are planted at the root of the south wall. It is a small but dynamic courtyard. Through the description of siheyuan in this novel, we can understand the general situation of traditional quadrangles. In addition, Guan's courtyard is neat, but its owner is a traitor. Master Qi is the symbol of four generations living together, but he chose such a disordered courtyard. Can we guess that the traditional four generations living together is declining?

The siheyuan in *The Yellow Storm* is only a representative of architecture. Lau Shaw's novels also describe other forms of architecture, such as hutong. Xiaoyangquan Hutong can be said to be very typical. It has appeared three times in his novels, namely, *A Little Man's Biography*, *The Yellow Storm* and *Under the Zhenghong's Flag*. The Xiaoyangquan Hutong is a gourd shaped hutong. The entrance of the hutong is very narrow. If you don't pay attention, you will ignore the past. The hutong includes gourd waist, gourd chest and gourd belly. Each courtyard is adjacent to each other. For example, there are three families separated from the Qis by the wall in *The Yellow Storm*. This closed environment is prone to produce an acquaintance culture based on human feelings. For example, Li Sima regards everyone as her "baby".

Another example is clothing. The "Qingyangzhou pants", "Baixishibu coat" and "Zhuadihu boots" in *The Spear of Breaking Heart* let us understand the clothing characteristics of traditional martial artists. The "Dachanghoujin" and "Changgua" in *Erma* let us understand the dressing style of traditional middle and upper class people.

## **2.2. Skill-Based Culture:the Spear of Breaking Heart and Wushu, Rabbit and Traditional Opera**

Skill-based culture refers to skills and art and the culture that they express.

"The spear of breaking heart" represents a Wushu skill. To practice Wushu, we must first learn moves. In Lau Shaw's *The Spear of Breaking Heart*, "slashing and shifting, squatting and flashing", "stamping mud" and "Huazi" make people excited; Secondly, to practice Wushu, there should also be corresponding Wushu instruments, such as Sha Zilong's spear of breaking heart, which is a big spear. The body of the spear is a cold, slippery, hard and trembling pole, which shakes people's heart and soul when used; Finally, there should be corresponding costumes. When setting up a venue at the temple fair, Wang Sansheng and his attendants would wear "Qingyangzhou pants", new "Baixishibu coat" and "fish-scale shoes", with the air of martial artists. Practicing Wushu can not only strengthen the body, but also cultivate people's mental outlook. Whether it's Sha Zilong who has decided to give up practicing the "spear of breaking heart", Wang Sansheng, the great apprentice of Sha Zilong, or old man Sun, who came to ask Sha Zilong for advice on spear skills, their eyes are dark and shining, indicating the spirit of daring to struggle and forge ahead from inside to outside.

Through Lau Shaw's *The Spear of Breaking Heart*, we have a general understanding of the traditional Wushu culture, and through the study of Lau Shaw's another novel *Rabbit*, we can

understand all aspects of the art of traditional opera. Mr. Chen, the protagonist of *Rabbit*, although he was not from a troupe, and his skills are not particularly exquisite, but through his appearance, steps, style, and body, we can find that the most important thing for singing is to have talent, otherwise he will like "me", "cannot sing the charm"; The second is to practice day after day, otherwise, like Mr. Chen's last situation, no one will support him. Thirdly, the costume is also very important. Without that costume, you can't sing on the stage and become famous; Finally, the stage style is the key skill of singing opera. Mr. Chen "every step with a raised hand is in place, and the performance has reached its perfection." Although there are very few people supporting him, he still insists on singing. This is the tradition of singing opera: once the opera begins, it must be finished.

### 3. Description of Conceptual Culture

Conceptual culture refers to people's ideology and the culture it embodies.

#### 3.1. The Concept of Forbearance and Obedience: Sad Informing, Etc

In traditional Chinese culture, the concept of forbearance and obedience has a profound impact on people. When it comes to the attitude of the superior, people generally subconsciously obey the instructions of the superior. In Lau Shaw's novels, the concept of forbearance and obedience is reflected in many places. In *Sad Informing*, Jin Ziliang's house was occupied by the "subjugated slave", and the "subjugated slave" did all bad things to him, but he did not dare to say anything. The son of the rickshaw puller was kidnapped by the "subjugated slave" and demanded a ransom. He did not dare to fight with him, but he could not collect enough money, only asking the "subjugated slave" to let them go. It wasn't until his son was "kill it" that he no longer forbore and determined to avenge his son. When Qi Tianyou in *The Yellow Storm* saw the unreasonable price list given by the Japanese, "he didn't say a word, put on his hat and went out", because he still had a family to take care of, so he could only swallow the grievances and sufferings into his stomach and didn't dare to resist. The "me" in *My Whole Life* endured humiliation for a living, was severely treated by the boss and scolded by the boss's wife, just to have a craft and live. The little daughter-in-law of the Wang family in *The Liu Family courtyard* endured the scolding of her father-in-law and sister-in-law and the violence of her husband. She really couldn't stand it, so she went to the road of self destruction. This concept of forbearance and obedience has created the Chinese people's cultural mentality and behavior of muddling along, which is very noteworthy.

#### 3.2. The Concept of Father's Love and Children's Filial Piety:the Old Tragedy in the New Era, Etc.

In *The Old Tragedy of the New Era*, Mr. Chen held his posture, abide by the old manners, and taught his son. He is an image of a feudal father. Chen Lianbo is very respectful and obedient to his father. His father is his rock. He often offered his filial piety to his father, that is, filial piety to his father some "small business". More than that, he listened to Mr. Chen's dispatch in everything and followed the traditional filial piety. Master Qi in *The Yellow Storm* got along well with his younger generation, taught his children well and treated all children equally. He was a person who really practiced "being a father should be kind to teach." [3]As the eldest son, Qi Tianyou abided by filial piety. After finishing the work in the shop, he never forget to go home and saw the old man. Even when Peking fell and business was bleak, he still celebrated his birthday. As a father, Qi Tianyou let his children do what he wanted to do, loved them, and wanted to support them. Wang Ju Ren In *Cremation* is also a typical image of a loving father. He loves his daughter very much and regards her as his jewel in his palm, and even develops to the point of doting. Menglian also loves her father very much. Although she later broke the father

daughter relationship with Wang Ju Ren because Wang Ju Ren betrayed the country, it is undeniable that the traditional concept of filial piety still has an impact on Menglian.

### **3.3. The Concept of Showing Love and Respect as Good Brothers: Black and White Li, Etc.**

The Black Li in Black and White Li is a symbol of the concept of showing love and respect as good brothers. Black Li and White Li liked a woman at the same time, but Black Li ceded the woman to White Li because he "cannot lose the harmony of his brothers because of a woman." After learning that White Li was going to separate their family, Black Li said, "He takes whatever he likes to take". and Black Li's graciousness, friendliness and love to White Li fully embodies the brotherly ethics in traditional Chinese literature. On the other hand, although White Li likes to disobey his elder brother and plan to split up with his elder brother, but his feelings for his elder brother are still a bit hard to part with. He expressed his care for his brother through "I", which shows that traditional concepts still have a certain influence on him. Qi Ruixuan in *The Yellow Storm* is also a figure greatly influenced by traditional ideas, so he should care about his younger brother, be a good elder brother in front of his younger brother and be a stable person. For example, when Qi Ruifeng wanted to be the section chief, he didn't directly accuse Ruifeng of being a traitor, but asked him whether he knew that the section chief was equivalent to a traitor. After learning that Qi Ruifeng didn't know it, he began to reason with Qi Ruifeng and hoped that he wouldn't go astray. He was a mature and steady good brother who thought of his brother everywhere.

## **4. Description of Socio-Ecological Culture**

Socio-ecological culture refers to people's social relations in social life and the culture it embodies.

### **4.1. Official Career Culture: Biography of Niu Tianci, Problems that are not a Problem, Etc.**

Since ancient times, China has had the idea that learning is to be an official. For example, it is recorded in *The Analects of Confucius* that Zixia, a student of Confucius, said that "excellence in learning leads to official positions." [4] In the Biography of Niu Tianci, when the old lady Niu gave Niu Tianci to catch One-Year-Old-Catch, she deliberately took those officialdom objects for him to catch. When she died, she also asked Niu Tianci: "Fuguan, be strong, read books, and be an official. I like it underground." The same is true of Ma Zeren in *Erma*. He regards being an official as a matter of honoring his ancestors and has a "bureaucratic" style. When communicating with Li Zirong, he thinks Li is his subordinate and calls him "man Li". When thinking about life, he always thinks "why live? Be an official".

After becoming an official, people need to follow the hidden rules of their official career. The story in *Problems That Are Not a Problem* took place in Chongqing during the Anti Japanese war. There is a Shuhua farm with good conditions in all aspects. Under the management of farm manager Ding Wuyuan, this farm always loses money. The reason is that Ding Wuyuan always allows workers to slow down and only pays attention to the human relationship with workers. After You Daxing took over the farm after studying abroad, he worked tirelessly and considered everything for the farm, but he was driven away by others. This is because You Daxing didn't give them the opportunity to be lazy and reap some profit, that is, he didn't follow the hidden rules of his official career, so he was forced to leave office. In *A Story Heard*, Mr. Song has no skill, but will look at everyone with a smile, but he also "unintentionally" follows those hidden rules: the wife receives gifts, and the master sophisticates the behavior of receiving gifts, which shows us a picture of useless people in a high position.

#### **4.2. Neighborhood Culture: Liu Family Courtyard, the Yellow Storm, Etc.**

Neighborhood culture is a kind of culture based on neighborhood relations. In Liu family courtyard, we can see the neighborhood culture in which harmony is the most precious. When they meet, they greet "have you eaten?", showing a sense of harmony; Even if Zhang Er owed the landlord two months' rent, the landlord would give him a grace date and didn't drive him out; Wang's little daughter-in-law is angry at home, and sister-in-law Zhang will comfort her. The relationship between the neighbors is relatively harmonious.

In the Yellow Storm, Lau Shaw takes the Qi family as the center and shows us the interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationship of the little sheepfold. The relationship of the little sheepfold is very complex. The people living here have different identities, including intellectuals, businessmen, officials, missionaries and so on. From the social activities of these people, we can also discover China's neighborhood culture where harmony is the most important thing. The Xiaoyangjuan Hutong is divided into gourd waist, gourd breast and gourd belly. Master Qi is willing to associate with people with gourd breast and gourd belly, but is unwilling to communicate with people with gourd waist, because most people living in gourd waist have poor character and low quality. Although Master Qi never treated these people as neighbors, but he did not deliberately exclude them. Even Guan Xiaohe, he most hates, came to visit, he didn't leave him outside the door. He just took Xiaoshun'er to his house and asked Ruixuan and Ruiquan to accompany him in the living room. However, the harmony in the Liu Family Courtyard is somewhat different from that in The Yellow Storm. The harmony in The Yellow Storm always gives people a feeling of "holding", and there is more "grounding" in the Liu family courtyard. This difference may have a great relationship with the different social status of the characters.

#### **4.3. Business Culture: New Hamlet, Time Honored Brand, Etc.**

Chinese people will always unconsciously follow some "old traditions" when doing business. In New Hamlet, Tian Lied's family often sent out a family to deal with the primary agricultural products they bought when doing business. When buying agricultural products, they like to bargain, but when they sell them, they are very real, the materials added are very "authentic", This is the business model under the small-scale peasant economy. The production and operation units are small in scale, low in production efficiency, and dominated by vertical transactions. However, this business model has gradually collapsed under the economic aggression of the West. The capitalist economic production model is highly efficient and the price is low, squeezing the traditional handicraft industry into no room for survival.

The same is true of Time Honored Brand. Sanhexiang was previously a store managed by "old hands". It has "official atmosphere" decoration, quiet and elegant environment and gentleman's demeanor. It is an old shop with very traditional color. However, this business model was also impacted by the capital operation model, so there was a change of shopkeeper and rules. However, when sanhexiang improved a little, shopkeeper Zhou was poached by Tiancheng shop, so Xin Dezhi planned to compromise: "old brands are worth preserving, and new methods have to be learned". but Xin Dezhi could not effectively bring sanhexiang back to life. The traditional business operation model is very fragile. The Time honored Brand also implies Lau Shaw's thinking on how traditional culture develops: The times have changed, should the old one be discarded?

### **5. Conclusion**

Lau Shaw has a very deep understanding of Chinese traditional culture, many of which are turned into artistic images and presented in his novels. From these novels, we can see the unique vivid appearance of traditional culture under the social and historical background of the

time, and marvel at Lau Shaw's familiarity and thinking about traditional culture. From Lau Shaw's thinking, we can see that there are many deficiencies in traditional Chinese culture. He criticized these deficiencies through his pungent brushstrokes. However, by analyzing the text, we can also know that Lau Shaw still has nostalgia for and dissatisfaction with traditional culture, which constitutes Lau Shaw's extremely complicated attitude towards traditional culture.

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