

A comparative literary study of Ye Lingfeng's works

Focusing on the influence of Freud's psychoanalysis and Western literature

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Ye Lingfeng (1905-1975) was a bibliophile. Between the ages of 20 and 30, he spent money earned from editorial work and royalties to buy over ten thousand books. Most of them were Western books. His collection in Shanghai has been lost during the period of Japanese rule. However, we can find in his works that he was influenced by those books.

Born in Nanjing, Ye Lingfeng went to Shanghai in 1924 to enter Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts. From 1925 to early 1927, he was a member of the Creation Society. At the Creation Society, he drew covers and illustrations of organ magazines, helped to establish the publishing department, and wrote novels and essays while doing editorial work and miscellaneous tasks. He was longing for the romanticism of the Creation Society. Also, he was devoted to Western aesthetic art at the end of the 19th century. Even after he left the Creation Society, his tastes in art reminded the same. After 1932, he changed the style and became a modernist writer. He worked in Shanghai from 1924 to 1938. Almost all of his novels had been written in these 15 years. The purpose of this article is to research where and how the Western influences that he had received appear in his works.

In the first chapter, we firstly describe the characteristics of Freud psychoanalysis acceptance in China and in the Creation Society. After that, we take four novels as examples, "A descendant of Nuwa" which applied the structure of the mind, "Sister's wedding night" which applied dream analysis, "Tomorrow" which applied free association and "Moga's attempt" which is related to moral masochism. Through those works, we consider that how he applied Freud theory to his works.

The basic concept of Freud psychoanalysis is the unconscious. In 1900, "Dream Interpretation" which established the relationship between the unconscious mind and dreams, was published. As a result, Freud psychoanalysis received worldwide attention. Psychoanalysis also caused a huge boom in China in the 1920s and 30s, and it was applied to many literary creations and literary criticisms. It can be said that Ye Lingfeng's creative activities started with the Freud boom. He wrote novels by applying Freud psychoanalysis. Therefore, he was called a pioneer author of psychoanalysis novels as well as a sexual novelist. The search for how to effectively portray the unconscious mind of characters also fostered his obsession with the technique of the novel. It is unavoidable to discuss Ye's early works without Freud psychoanalysis.

In the second chapter, we discuss one of the works that depicts a dream, "Jiu Lumei". This work is also considered to have been created under the influence of Freud psychoanalysis.

Previous studies have pointed out that Ye Lingfeng used the technique called “Mise en abyme” in “Jiu Lumei”. However, it has not been specifically described the appearance of “Mise en abyme” in “Jiu Lumei” and its effect. In this chapter, through perusing the text, we study those points in detail. By pursuing the essence of “Mise en abyme”, “duplication of the theme within the work”, we also find Ye’s obsession with aestheticism.

Since 1932, his style has changed and he is said to have transformed himself into a modernist writer and approached the Chinese neo-sensualism. In the third chapter, based on previous studies and texts, we confirm that Ye’s heroine’s looks have something in common with the heroines that Liu Na’ou and Mu Shiyong drew. Then, we explore the reasons why Ye’s works give different impressions by focusing on the female characters, the male protagonist's gaze, and the relationship between men and women. As a result, we find that Ye’s view of women has not changed consistently since his early works, and that it differs from that of Liu Na’ou and Mu Shiyong’s. One of the things that influenced the men and women he drew is “The Lady of the Camellias”, which he had long admired since he was a boy.

In the fourth chapter, we choose “Lilith” from his modernist works, compare with “The Daughter of Lilith” written by Anatole France, and explain that this work was inspired by “The Daughter of Lilith”. It can be thought of as follows. Ye found in France’s “The Daughter of Lilith” a beautiful story of Lilith, which was different from the Western literary tradition that portrayed Lilith as a witch. He also found a solution to his dissatisfaction and skepticism about the authority of the church. He was inspired to write “Lilith” by his sympathy with the innocent Lilith’s representation created by France. Ye wrote “Lilith” based on “The Daughter of Lilith”. He depicted an innocent woman living in Shanghai in the 1930s and a man who longed for such a woman and pursued her in “Lilith”.

His works have not been criticized for a long time. In the 1980s, as previously denigrated writers were reevaluated and collections of their work were published, Ye’s works were also read again. Then, studies about Ye’s works have been accumulated. However, even though nearly 40 years have already passed, it cannot be said that progress has been remarkable. Especially, there are few studies in Japan.

Through a close reading of the text, and on the basis of the words of his essays, we research Western influences that can be found in Ye Lingfeng’s works.