

PEOPLE AND ART: EXPRESSIONS OF THE TIMES

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Abstract. The history of modern and contemporary Chinese literature over the past century demonstrates that the artistic achievements and ideological depth of outstanding literary works are closely tied to the fate of the people. Works that depict daily life, document social changes, reflect the pulse of the times, and shape unique artistic representations of the people are often regarded as masterpieces. Various literary movements have interacted and collectively driven the development of “people’s art” and the “image of the people” throughout changing times. These movements continually absorb fresh influences, expand their rich connotations, and contribute to a vibrant and diverse literary landscape. The exchange of civilizations has further promoted the shared prosperity of cultural and artistic endeavors. The writing and construction of people’s art and the image of the people originate from the people, are created for the people, and ultimately belong to the people. The foundation of people’s art aligns with the pursuit of national independence and the prosperity of the era, flourishing to become the defining theme of its time.

Keywords: Image of the peoples, art, Chinese literature, expressions of the times

İnsanlar və incəsənət: zamanın ifadələri

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Xülasə. Son yüzillikdə müasir və çağdaş Çin ədəbiyyatının tarixi göstərir ki, görkəmli ədəbi əsərlərin bədii uğurları və ideoloji dərinliyi xalqın taleyi ilə sıx bağlıdır. Gündəlik həyatı təsvir edən, ictimai dəyişiklikləri sənədləşdirən, zamanın ritmini əks etdirən və xalqın bənzərsiz bədii obrazlarını yaradan əsərlər adətən şah əsər kimi qəbul olunur. Müxtəlif ədəbi cərəyanlar bir-biri ilə qarşılıqlı əlaqədə olmuş və dəyişən dövrlər boyunca “xalq incəsənəti” və “xalq obrazı”nın inkişafını birgə təşviq etmişdir. Bu cərəyanlar daim yeni təsirləri mənimsəmiş, məzmunlarını zənginləşdirmiş və canlı, rəngarəng bir ədəbi mənzərə yaratmışdır. Sivilizasiyalar arasında mübadilə mədəni və bədii fəaliyyətlərin ortaq rifahını daha da irəli aparmışdır. Xalq incəsənətinin və xalq obrazının yazılması və qurulması xalqdan qaynaqlanır, xalq üçün yaradılır və sonda xalqa məxsus olur. Xalq incəsənətinin təməli milli müstəqillik və dövrün rifahı ilə üst-üstə düşür və bu, dövrün müəyyən edici mövzuna çevrilərək inkişaf edir.

Açar sözlər: Xalq obrazı, incəsənət, Çin ədəbiyyatı, zamanın ifadələri

The history of modern and contemporary Chinese literature proves that artistic achievements and ideological content are intimately connected to the fate of the people. Works that write about daily life, record social changes, reflect the pulse of the times, and shape the unique artistic image of the people are often excellent creations. Whether by Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Lao She, Cao Yu, or Zhao Shuli, Liu Qing, Sun Li, Lu Yao, Chen Zhongshi, Mo Yan... outstanding literary

figures have all shown deep affection for the people, and great artistic works are infused with profound “people’s” qualities. These works are both distinctly Chinese and widely beloved by readers. Over time, with vibrant life information, these works have passed down as classics. “Chinese modern and contemporary literature is rich in connotation; it integrates the aesthetic expression of the lives and cultural tastes of various social classes in modern China. It is the spiritual world of intellectuals who, during China’s transition from ancient to modern, pursued ideals, individuality, and values while expressing sincere emotions and noble desires. It intersects with the cultural aspirations of the Communist Party of China, but also spans broader areas of free expression”. The stance of people’s art, in harmony with the national independence and prosperity of the era, grows robustly, becoming the main theme of the times.

1. Building the Concept of People’s Art

During the War of Resistance Against Japan, the long-oppressed and ruled masses became the subject of inspiration and mobilization, and the main force in the national united front. They joined the cause of national liberation. Using art to encourage and mobilize the people to join the revolution, defend their homes, serve the people, and spread culture while comforting the people became the primary goal of intellectuals and the general public in creating people’s art. Artists, on one hand, deeply engaged with the people’s lives, praising the masses and exposing the dark realities; on the other hand, they drew from the long history of Chinese civilization, inheriting national virtues and summarizing lessons from the past. Works like Guo Moruo’s *Qu Yuan*, Xiao Hong’s *The Tales of Hulan River*, Cao Yu’s *Beijing People and Family*, Lao She’s *Four Generations Under One Roof*, and Lu Ling’s *The Children of the Landlord* are all examples of intellectuals’ struggles during social transformation, demonstrating genuine affection for the people and capturing the grand social realities.

After the May Fourth New Culture Movement, under the influence of Marxist thought, Chinese left-wing literary movements rapidly developed, from “literary revolution” to “revolutionary literature”. Literary critics like Qu Qiubai, Lu Xun, Hu Feng, Zhou Yang, and Feng Xuefeng continuously discussed issues such as popularizing literature and the national form of literature. When the left-wing literary movement entered Yan’an, it continued to develop, adjusting and expanding in response to new issues, appearances, and trends. After the publication of Mao Zedong’s speech at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art, “Art for the People” became the guiding principle for literature and art in the liberated areas. Intellectuals worked together with the masses in a literary movement, combining traditional Chinese folk forms with mass art. The lively vitality of folk culture enriched the content of creative works, bringing them closer to the people and responding to the spontaneous art of the masses. No longer limited to “refined art”, the focus turned to praising socialist society, the socialist system, the masses’ struggles, and the honest and simple emotions of the people. Artists sought to break free from the ivory tower and connect with the people, breathing the same air. Major themes in liberated areas included the War of Resistance Against Japan, the War of Liberation, military life, land reform, and rural production. Various forms of art, such as folk songs, yangge dances, storytelling, and reciting poetry, became popular during the anti-Japanese period, turning into forms of art the people loved, with new literature gradually transforming into people’s art.

2. The Growth of People’s Art and the Image of the People

In the evolution of socialist Chinese culture, the shift from serving the working class, peasants, and soldiers, creating art for them, the “Hundred Flowers” policy, to the “Two for” orientation, and later the focus on “art for the people” with a “people-centered” creative direction, marked a significant development. The development of the theory of “people’s art” and its relationship with the continuous enrichment of the “image of the people” has provided invaluable practical experience and theoretical foundation for the development of socialist Chinese cultural undertakings.

The writing and construction of people’s art and the image of the people originate from the people and are for the people. During the Yan’an period, the idea of “people’s art” was put forward,

and the direction of “art for the people” was firmly established, which directly led and sparked the vigorous development of people’s art practices. The achievements of people’s art in the liberated areas reflected how the Chinese people, in opposing national oppression and various sufferings and struggles, overcame themselves, emphasizing the process of confronting human weaknesses and the building of the national character, with its hardworking and brave spirit. Zhao Shuli was praised by Zhou Yang as a “people’s artist with a unique and innovative popular style.” Rooted in Chinese rural life, he integrated his heart with the common people, feeling the power of the masses. His vivid and distinct depictions of the old and new images of the people are exemplary figures in the gallery of modern and contemporary Chinese literary portraits.

In the late 1970s, with the opening-up reforms sweeping away the fog in China, returning literary workers responded to Deng Xiaoping’s call: “The people need art, and art needs the people more. We must consciously draw material, themes, plots, language, poetry, and artistic inspiration from the lives of the people, and nourish ourselves with the vitality of the people’s creation of history.” Thus, they resumed writing, exploring the new direction of contemporary Chinese literature, with literature becoming the vanguard of the “rectification” movement and the liberation of thoughts.

Since 1978, Chinese contemporary literature has entered a period of rapid development, from “scar literature” and “reflective literature” to “reform literature” and “root-seeking literature,” and even “avant-garde literature,” with an array of artists exploring their identities and searching for a path to national rejuvenation. These writers, while reflecting on the current state and absorbing avant-garde thoughts, returned to the vibrant, real lives of the people, to the soil of traditional national civilization, and to the fundamentals of art itself, seeking the roots of literary creation.

3. Youth Writing and the Expression of Life in the Times

A century after the May Fourth Movement, the echo of Liang Qichao’s call for a “Youthful China” still resonates today. The new generation of youth in the contemporary era presents a subject for study by both writers and critics of the same age, who seek to understand and engage with the spiritual world of today’s youth, reflecting their responses to the times.

In the rapidly changing era, youth writers are recording their concerns, thoughts, and their attempts to find meaning in life through the way they live and approach problems. Urban youth often find themselves suspended between the real world and the virtual world, experiencing a floating sense that reflects the influence of their upbringing and environment. Writers like Zhou Jianing, in novels such as *Basic Beauty*, describe this sense of floating, which conveys an almost surreal passion, a light-hearted sincerity, and an anticipation of a new world opening up. Others, like Zhang Yuran in *Home*, explore the meaning of “home” through the dual perspectives of a young educated woman and a migrant worker, while Wang Suxin’s *The White Night Photography Studio* imagines a world where city newcomers try to reconstruct their past and ideal identities through fake photographs.

The daily lives of the people and their experiences, captured by successive generations of writers, have become central themes. Today’s youth writers continue this tradition of depicting daily life, creating works that reflect the diverse, vibrant realities of their times. Contemporary people’s art must inherit the basic principles established in the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art, while embracing new literary phenomena, such as popular art, mass culture, and internet art. It must continue to cultivate independent judgment and creativity in the rich accumulation of literary traditions and form new literary classics, fulfilling the eternal mission of literary workers to explore the ideal possibilities of art.