A Study of Feng Zikai's Prose from the Perspective of Modernity

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ABSTRACT

Feng Zikai who has an important influence on the creation of Chinese new literature is the master of modern prose creation. His prose is winding and fresh, focusing on the description of people and things in daily life as well as views of life and world. His words are elegant and pure. Several pieces of his prose have been incorporated into the primary school textbooks. He had become a famous modern writer. This thesis studies Feng Zikai's prose in the light of new literature and modernist literature. From the perspective of the content, structure and central idea of his prose, the author comments on his works according to the related modernity viewpoint, aiming to provide the reference material for the research on Feng Zikai's prose.

KEYWORDS
Feng Zikai; prose; modernity

INTRODUCTION

Prose is a kind of literary genre that mainly expresses the actual life, knowledge and experience of the writer and also contains the writer's true feelings and related thoughts. The length of the prose is flexible but most of proses are short. As a master of modern prose, Feng Zikai has a unique style in prose creation. Affected by the Western documentary literature, the style of his works is featured by short-length, beautiful, vivid and interesting expressions. In recent years, the study of Feng Zikai's prose has become another major research field after his painting. Conducting research on Feng Zikai's prose from the aspect of modernistic thought has good value and research significance, which not only play an important role in the understanding of Feng Zikai's prose creation and style, but also provide a necessary way to understand him.

INTRODUCTION OF FENG ZIKAI AND HIS PROSE WORKS

Feng Zikai (9/11/1898-15/9/1975) was born at Shimen town, Tongxiang city, Jiaxing City, Zhejiang Province, China. He was an essayist, painter, writer, artist and music educator. His original name was Run, also known as Ren or Reng. He took the name Zikai later, with the pseudonym TK. Feng Zikai's main prose works include Yuanyuan Tang Informal Essays, Art Fun, The Carriage Society, Selection of Feng Chunxiao Li, Guangxi Vocational College of Technology and Business; Nanning 530008 China
Zikai's Works, etc. Although Feng Zikai is world famous for his painting \(^1\), he had a higher understanding than most painters did in many art forms, such as calligraphy and decorative arts. As an important platform for Feng Zikai to describe life, express feelings and show emotion, prose occupied a higher position in Feng Zikai's literary creation. The study of Feng Zikai's prose was later than the study of his caricatures. Feng Zikai began his prose creation in 1914. He was 16 years old at that time but had published 4 classical Chinese fables in Magazine for Young. In the later several years, Feng Zikai continued his prose creation and produced a large number of excellent works. It was an important prose writer in the new literary creation then. According to the relevant studies, Feng Zikai's prose creation began in 1922. After he worked at Chunhui Middle School, he began to publish articles on semimonthly Chunhui, such as Youth and Nature, Life in Landscape, and so on. Prose in this period gradually laid the keynote for Feng Zikai's prose creation, forming a distinctive style. In the following decades, Feng Zikai had been constantly creating new works, including 17 important collections of essays, with a total of more than 1 million words. This number of words does not include the number of words in his work collection that he talked about art problems in the prose style, such as the Discussion on Art \(^2\).

Feng Zikai's prose works were quite abundant, and literary critics began to pay close attention to him when he published massive works. Between 1925 and 1980, the comments on Feng Zikai's prose were mostly naturalistic impressionistic comments, mainly focusing on the Buddhist thoughts and the fresh style embodied in his works. After 1980s, the study of his works mostly based on modern ideas and the core arguments of the research also changed.

**STUDY OF THE ARTISTIC STYLE OF FENG ZIKAI'S PROSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MODERNITY**

The discussion of modernity began in the late twentieth century. Although the concrete definition of modernity in Chinese academia is ambiguous, a nearly standardized definition represented by Weber's conceptual definition of modernity is widely accepted. It interprets modernity as a single pattern and a set of institutional and cultural changes. Feng Zikai's prose reveals a context of chat and possibilities of communicating with readers are hidden in the text. At the same time, words and phrases show obvious artistic characteristics. The description of the life is like a show of natural process, which brings readers a quiet and tranquil atmosphere. His prose works mainly use plain words, without miscellaneous chapters and flowery language, revealing the real features of Feng Zikai's prose works, The Yuanyuan Tang Essays is the most important and representative work of Feng Zikai. He combined childlike innocence with Zen interest, which not only showed forthright and sincere, but also achieved the creative aspiration of returning to nature.

It is believed in art critics that Feng Zikai's prose has a sense of picture, which is similar to that of his caricature works. The relevant research proves that Feng Zikai's prose or literary works are indeed influenced by his achievements in art. The concise and focused words give a strong sense of picture and substitution to readers, vividly demonstrating a market-style caricature \(^3\). It can also be seen that Feng Zikai's prose has a good mass character and foundation. “Painting-in-poetry and poetry-in-painting” is high evaluation of poetry and painting, which means various elements achieve good interaction and mutual demonstration in different art forms. Feng Zikai's prose also
has this characteristic. Mr. Yu Pingbo said that Feng Zikai's caricature is “as pieces of petals which contains sentiment of the world”. Such comment is also suitable for his prose. Those words maybe express some dull feelings in a plain way, which is not so wonderful but full of kindness.

Yu Dafu said Feng Zikai's prose had “the fine grace of Zhejiang people”. He believed that Feng Zikai's prose highlights the style, charm and emotion, which not only shows the writer's own life, but also examines it from the angle of art at the same time. With a closer look, each of his prose work is the meticulous description of a life scene or scenery, because any trivial and slight thing can be used by Feng Zikai to show a special feeling. The writing has become the carrier of the writer's inspiration and spirit.

STUDY OF THE IDEOLOGICAL CONNOTATION OF FENG ZIKAI'S PROSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MODERNITY

There is no doubt that the modernity of Feng Zikai's prose went through collisions between the Western and Eastern cultures, and it developed and perfected based on the continuous accumulation and evolution in culture conflicts and small matters. In China, modernity is a literary and artistic concept defined according to time and it contains a rational and progressive ideological quality. The literary works born under this idea have a kind of care for the real society and its core content is the positive effect of the modernization of science and technology. For example, the development of modern technology promotes the progress in society, economy, material, medicine, health and other aspects, but at the same time, it also generates various cultural sociology problems, such as the suspension of historicism and disorder of cultural structure. These problems are manifested in the realistic society, such as the identity crisis caused by globalization and urbanization, the superficial spiritual life under the consumer culture, the gap between the rich and the poor, the abnormal interpersonal relationship brought by the consumption economy, and so on. From the realistic perspective, most of Feng Zikai's prose works reflected problems of the social modernity; he also found the relationship with traditional literature and in the process of modernization and ultimately achieving the interpretation of reality from the angle of art. In terms of ideological connotation, the meandering prose works of Feng Zikai contain the theme derived from a national critique of Lu Xun, disgust at urban life and love of quiet life in the countryside, in which there are sympathy for the lower people and protests against foreign enemies.

The ideological content originates in the real life. The middle and late twentieth century was a period of intense social unrest in china. Feng Zikai amplified and criticized some phenomena through his prose, showing the depression and ugliness of urban life. At the same time, he criticized the existing crisis that the material crushed spiritual civilization at the spiritual height, reflecting the strong realism characteristics. Feng Zikai has made a good exposition of the relationship between the world and art. He made use of the artistic style of writing to describe the world and the problems in life, while readers can enjoy extraordinary artistic charm in the ordinary descriptions, which reflects Feng Zikai's skills in prose creation. For examples, “It seems to me that there is a huge and complex network in the world...Only cut the line connecting with “money” can one return with satisfaction” (Cut the Net); “Later, the kind of animals, “human beings”, gradually
became clever and developed, and then they took over the earth and supported themselves by utilizing the rest of the earth” (Garden of Art). There are many similar fragments, which focus on Feng Zikai’s thoughts and observations on life, human nature, world changes and the relationship between the world and human beings.

The concern for human nature and the view of the world had always been the purport of Feng Zikai’s prose creation. Because of the social realities in the twentieth Century, science and technology had not yet had huge impacts on social structure and human life. Therefore, Feng Zikai indirectly understood that modern science would have impacts on people’s understanding and thinking, which could be seen from the destruction of realism. Shanghai, a metropolis closely related to Feng Zikai’s real life, had provided a lot of help for his observation and thinking of modernity. Here takes the description of passengers and the environment in the Carriage Society as an example – “In short, when I am taking train in the reality, it seems as if I stand aloof from the world in the spirit.” This metaphysical description vividly expressed Feng Zikai’s criticism of action and space constraints that modern industrial society brought to people. On the one hand, he could not live without the important help brought by industrial civilization to his life. But on the other hand, he placed the deep connotations of the spirit outside his body, yearning for scenes of freedom and restlessness. At the same time, Feng Zikai expressed a deep concern about modern people who were obsessed with the vanity of modern society and could not extricate themselves. There is a description in the Carriage Society like this: “When I see the kids gesticulating and talking by the train window, I despise them. I think these inexperienced guys are ignorant, shallow and ridiculous.” He described the innocent and pure children in the past with “ignorant”, “shallow and ridiculous” and other expressions, which fully showed his concern about their ignorance and wallow. This seemingly resent description was the Feng Zikai’s reluctant action, when he could not break the modern cage to save people. This also indicated that the overwhelming victory of modernity would, to a large extent, violate the free life of mankind and made them become terrible science and technology servants.

STUDY OF THE STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FENG ZIKAI’S PROSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MODERNITY

In order to highlight the central idea of his prose, Feng Zikai not only employed beautiful and lively expressions, but also used some special structures, mainly including narration interspersed with comments, flashback, stream of consciousness, etc. On the basis of the study of the structure of traditional prose, Feng Zikai had his own unique features in the study of prose structure. The length of his early prose works, such as the Yuanyuan Tang Essays, is usually short and the general narrative method is adopted. His prose has a distinct structure feature of deduction and induction, with his own understanding in communicative expressions. Another example is his Early Morning, which mainly describes the process that a group of ants transport food tirelessly in the early morning. The author described the action and form of ants with a delicate style of writing. This article begins with a description of the scene, and then the theme of this essay is revealed. After a simple description, emotional observation and philosophic thoughts of this phenomenon is presented. The basic thinking way of Feng Zikai’s writing can be seen from the layout of his prose works. He put the theme to be expressed in the environment and the object. By
integrating the description of nature into situation, he took advantage of speculation and artistry to intuitively deepen the understanding and then let the observation rise to an ideological level, and ultimately highlighted the theme of the work.

Feng Zikai's narrative prose also has the structural characteristic that it organizes materials and narrates matters according to the chronological order, spatial location and the nature of things. Taking the famous *Autumn* for an instance, he explained his own age at the beginning; and in the next paragraph, he mixed and intertwined the situation of two years ago and now, vividly depicting his favorite love and sigh for autumn. After expressing the basic feelings, the writer shifted to the description of the status quo, which was insipid. It did not focus on the description of scene but highlighted the mood and past feelings of the autumn. Finally, the writer made the essay of scenery become an article in which the scene and mood combined and contrasted finely with each other.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Feng Zikai, as a representative writer of Chinese modern literature, showed much care of the world and human in his prose. At the same time, his prose also has distinctive characteristics in the structure and expressions. So that he became a representative of great writers in modern China. In the light of my research, Feng Zikai's prose has its unique features in depicting life scenes, creating ideal atmosphere and expressing cynicism. This has a great connection with the guiding ideology of his prose creation based on both Buddhist ideas and Confucianism. It can be said that the research on Feng Zikai's prose from the perspective of modernity can make its significance to the Chinese prose creation under the guidance of modernism clearer. The practical value of Feng Zikai's prose lies not only in the care of the Chinese society in the twentieth century, but also in the care and realization of his inner world Feng Zikai realized the self-sublimation of his soul in the world of the prose, with a perfect sense blending in the material society which seemingly fell apart in twentieth Century. It is not only consistent with the modernity, but also betrays the pure modernity to some extent.

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**REFERENCES**