Defects in Abridgements of Classical Pages in Chinese Textbooks—Moonlight over the Lotus Pond, Trapped in Gaixia and The Last Lecture

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Abstract. Excellent literary works are the union of high degree artistry and ideology. However, many great works in Chinese text books from primary school to college have been violently and substantially abridged by editors for reasons of pornography, violence and ideology, such as Moonlight over the Lotus Pond, Trapped in Gaixia and The Last Lecture. The purpose of abridgement is to protect physical and mental health of students and to maintain the authority of the mainstream ideology on the surface. However, such deed is too sensitive that it undermines the artistical integrity of outstanding works and students can not scruple to study and achieve a higher level of ideological realm by learning the abridged works.

Introduction

Excellent literary works are the union of high degree artistry and ideology, by whose standard, selected articles in Chinese text books from primary school to college should be no doubt of such works that demonstrate both artistry and ideology. Editors of text book shall do no more than appropriately polishing and modifying. However, in a general survey on Chinese text books, from primary school to college level, some works have been brutally abridged by editors since 1950s, which make the original literary works defective. Reasons that editors did so are mostly because of certain ideological scruples. The removal of certain ideological content undermines the artistic integrity of literary works, and thus perverts the more profound ideology of the original works. Editors are mostly sensitive in aspects of pornography, violence and ideology harm when selecting and editing text books, as the readers of text books are under age students and language teaching is also a public education with political influence. Moonlight over the Lotus Pond by Ziqing Zhu, Trapped in Gaixia selected in Biographic Sketches of Emperor Xiang Yu and The Last Lecture by Yiduo Wen are the three most typical articles among all abridged works that their artistic and ideological values are greatly impaired. This paper analyses the above three articles and elaborates how abridgement impairs excellent literary works.

Moonlight over the Lotus Pond

From 1950 to 2003, if a student only reads Moonlight over the Lotus Pond by Ziqing Zhu through Chinese text books, he was not likely to read the following: Or beauties just out of the bath.

It was young girls who went gathering lotuses, in sampans and singing love songs. Needless to say, there were a great number of them doing the gathering, apart from those who were watching. It was a lively season, brimming with vitality, and romance. A brilliant description can be found in Lotus Gathering written by the Yuan Emperor of the Liang Dynasty:

So those charming youngsters row their sampans, heart buoyant with tacit love, pass to eath other cups of wine while their bird- shaped prows drift around. From time to time their oars are caught in dangling algae, and duckweed float apart the moment their boats are about to move on. Their slender figures, girdled with plain silk, tread watchfully on board. This is the time when spring is growing into summer, the leaves a tender green and the flowers blooming—among which the girls...
are giggling when evading an outreaching stem. Their shirts tucked in for fear that the sampan might tilt.

That is a glimpse of those merrymaking scenes. It must have been fascinating, but unfortunately we have long been denied such a delight. [1]

During 1950 to 2003 the vast majority of schools across the country used textbooks published by the People’s Education Publishing House in which these above quoted parts were deleted by editors [2] for the concern of pornography harm. In specific political period and culture environment, such concerns were understandable and excusable. But if valued with modern point of views, it was too sensitive to do so. Studies were hindered by the abridgement and students could not overcome the concerned pornography problem to reach a higher level of understanding the ideology of the original article by reading the description of these beauties of the body and charming youngsters’ life.

Of course, such an abridged and profound ideological damage to the article is due to its complete artistic destruction. The first quoted phrase “or beauties just out of the bath” is barely a sentence, but without which the image structure that the author carefully created in the 4th paragraph is greatly undermined. This structure that the author designed is to personify lotus to beauties. The personification appears everywhere in the article and each description to the beauty echoes and complements each other. For example, a silken field of leaves, reaching rather high above the surface, like the skirts of dancing girls in all their grace, is to imagine the lotus leaves as a beauty’s clothes; and then, here and there, layers of leaves are dotted with white lotus blossoms, some in demure bloom, others in shy bud, is to personify lotus flowers to the imagine of the image and posture of a beauty. Then the next sentence, like scattering pearls, or twinkling stars, or beauties just out of the bath [1], is an echo to the previous two clouses. Since lotus leaves are like clothes, then naturally lotus flowers are like Beauties out of bath, and only so demure bloom and others in shy bud make sense in terms of a girlish figure. With such images and article structure, the author describes a vivid and elegant picture of lotus beauty with a nice blend of lotuses image and beauty image. The image of a beauty out of bath could be something erotic, but how could students have immoral pornography impression if such a figure is read in the complete work? In fact, not only that they will not, but will create pure aesthetic admiration to the body of beauty with solemn respect out of their hearts. It is just like what it says in Love of Lotus by Dunyi Zhou. In respect that it is not contaminated even growing in the muddy pond, and does not seem seductive even being washing off in clear water for years. Its middle is empty, while the external is straight without any vines or side branches. The farther, the clearer aroma. Standing upright in the water, dignified and clean. Readers would only get the respect by reading such an article that it can be only appreciated distantly but not touched blasphemously.

Next, another abridgement up to 180 characters made an even worse defect to the integrity of artistry. After vivid description about the lotus pond with moonlight (the 4th paragraph), the moonlight over the lotus pond (the 5th paragraph) and the night scence around the lotus pond, words that were abridged appear as the last sentence in the 6th paragraph in the original article—he most lively creatures here, for the moment, must he the cicadas in the trees and the frogs in the pond. But the liveliness is theirs, I have nothing. And the first sentence in the 7th paragraph—Suddenly, something like lotus-gathering crosses my mind. It used to he celebrated as a folk festival in the South, probably dating very far back in history, most popular in the period of Six Dynasties. We can pick up some outlines of this activity in the poetry. Even without these 180 characters, readers may also feel the lotus pond and the moonlight are beautiful enough by reading the above 2 paragraphs, and could understand why he author is so immersed in the scence, which also explains the author’s thought mentioned at the beginning—As it is tonight, basking in a misty moonshine all by myself, I feel I am a free man, free to think of anything, or of nothing. All that one is obliged to do, or to say, in the daytime, can be very well cast aside now. That is the beauty of being alone. For the moment, just let me indulge in this profusion of moonlight and lotus fragrance. [1] The sentence—The most lively creatures here, for the moment, must he the cicadas in the trees and the frogs in the pond. But the liveliness is theirs, I have nothing, leaves the readers a feeling that it is cicadas and frogs break
the author's intoxicated state of mind and bring him back to reality. The profound meaning in “But the liveliness is theirs, I have nothing”. It will not cause people's attention, even if they feel there is something more to say, there is no way to get it. But once we put the abridged 180 characters back, and read them together with the 4th to the 6th paragraphs, a sense of surprised aesthetic beauty will be found. Compared with Emperor Yuan’s *Lotus Gathering*, these three paragraphs of Ziqing Zhu, which is famous for literary aesthetics, are easily outshone by Emperor Yuan’s artistic realm. Clearly, Emperor Yuan’s description to scence of the charming youngers pick lotus flowers is so much more brief and vivid, while Ziqing Zhu uses complex, specific and detailed rhetorics to describe the pond with moonlight, which seems clumsy and even contrived. In such a brilliant literary style of Emperor Yuan, merrymaking scenes built on the basis of heart buoyant with tacit love become true with the love between people and between people and nature. At the same time, we can feel that the author enjoys this environment so much that he has forgotten the existence of himself. Therefore, it proves the point explained in the previous paragraph of this paper that the romantic charming youngers figures would not leave students any erotic ideas but an eager to the great and harmonious freedom and happiness between individuals and groups, between human being and nature, based on and beyond the joy of life between men and women. Most importantly, under the contrast of such circumstances, Ziqing Zhu expresses his more profound and true thought in the full text. In fact his clumsy and contrived description to the Lotus Pond exposes his hidden inner activities. At the beginning he feels being alone is a high degree of freedom of life, so he tries deliberately to observe and imagine a quiet and elegant boundless lotus and moonlight in order to enjoy the beauty of solitude. But after three paragraphs, interrupted by cicadas and forgs, the author realizes that he has been kept out of the pond, and he has nothing to do with it. So cicadas and frogs are not the real things to break the author intoxicated state of mind, and bring him returned to reality (he has not been intoxicated at all). Contrary to his expectation to being alone, his spirit leaves the reality for the real fascinated freedom and a great realm of happiness—that is, the situation Emperor Yuan created in *Lotus Gathering* that unfortunately we have long been denied such a delight. Therefore, the author's last sentiment shows that the whole article should express a simple but profound philosophy of life that refers to reality—solidation is not a high level of individual freedom, the real great freedom is the ability to get along with human and nature. Ziqing Zhu explains his philosophy applied in reality in his essay *Where to Go* written one year later than *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*—The old era has collapsed, the new situation is yet not coming. Decline and commotion make everyone uneasy. The revolutionaries who have inadvertently or deliberately caused such anxiety surely don’t have the worries. Only by taking part in revolution or counter-revolution can solve the anxiety. If one couldn't or unwilling to take part in such practicases, he could only temporarly escape. This is a peaceful pretending that covers his anxiety and anesthetizes them. Ziqing Zhu’s solidation in the *Moonlight Over the Lotus Pond* is probably his escape in his later essay. As a petty bourgeoisie he made his alteral choice in the acute, harsh and cruel revolutionary or counter-revolutionary time (essentially Class Struggle) [3], he acted as living in another world and overcame the bound of an ordinary self [1], and under his peaceful protending surface (as contrive mentioned in this paper) was actually his lonliness, worries and disappointment. In his article writing the class struggle no longer exists, but in reality, the more people are denied to enjoy the delight of the great freedom of charming younger’s merry making, the more they yearn for it in their hearts.

**Trapped in Gaixia**

*Biographic Sketches of Emperor Xiang Yu* is a classical article in the annal-biography style historical record *The Scribe's Records*. *Trapped in Gaixia* is the masterpiece of Xiang Yu's short and glorious life. The following part of this artical was abridged in a widely used university Chinese textbook published in 2008 [4]. The abridgement started after Emperor Xiang Yu died from committing suicide:  

Wang Yi won the head of Xiang Yu, and other cavalries trampled each other to compete for the body of Xiang Yu, dozens of which were killed in the fight. Finally, interior cavalry commander
Yang Xi, chariot and horse commander Lv Ma Tong, official Lv Sheng Lang and Yang Wu, each fought for a limb. They put five pieces together and got the whole body. Therefore the land of Xiang Yu was divided into five pieces—Lv Ma Tong as the king of Zhongshui, Wang Yi as the king of Du Yan, Yangxi as the king of Chiquan, Yangwu as the king of Wufang and Lv Sheng as the king of Nie Yang. [5]

Apparently violence is the reason to abridge the above paragraph, which touched the editors over sensitive nerves, perhaps they worried the killing scences would trigger students’ violent propensity, or the bloody brutality would hurt students’ physical and mental heath. However, the abridgement is still inappropriate and unnecessary. It deprived the opportunity that students could enhance their ideological realm by reading such violent scenes. First of all, the abridgement violates the recording principle of the author Sima Qian—Do not pretend well, do not hide evil, and real history and human nature would not become non-violent because of such thoughtful abridgement and dissemblance which cannot prevent students from being hurt. On the contrary, as Mr. Lu Xun said, I have always not been afraid to speculate the worst of the Chinese people and really warriors, dare to face the bleak life, dare to face the dripping blood [6]. For college students who are going into society from campus, educators should guide them to observe society and human nature via various ways (literature is just one of the many methods), so that they would be able to face problems and obtain immunity, tolerance and resistance—the evil portrayed in a literary work is an effective vaccine. In addition, in human survival rules, especially in the law of war, in fact, the good and evil attribute of violence is biased towards neutrality. The judgment and choice to violence shall consider the characteristics of the violent subject. The advantage of literary works lies in its ability to create a fictitious scence through artistical work and allows inexperienced students to experience and make decision, which helps them form their personalities and enhances their ideological level.

As for the selected paragraphs in *Trapped in Gaixia*, Xiang Yu felt guilty and asked himself why should I cross Wu River, he was not hardhearted to kill his horse so he gave it to the township head. In the end, he gave his life to Lv Matong as a gift and commited suicide [10]. Such violence and death scence are really a shocking and moral tragic. Violent fight for fortune and fief, or the scence as in 'Wang Yi won the head of Xiang Yu, and other cavalries trampled each other to compete for the body of Xiang Yu', are really a despicable villain frenzied comedy. Lu Xun said that "tragedy destroys the value of life and show it to people, while comedy tears worthless things in front of people" [7], the above two scenes most appropriately explain the theory—the destruction and tearing of real flesh is shocking by the sight. The tragedy and comedy are connected to each other. On the contrary, Xiang Yu's heroic image is even taller while Wang Yi and other villains shrink as even more obscene figures. Therefore, if students can analyse the abridged violent scence with an overall view in the whole combination of tragicomedy art, they will be able to make a rational judgement to violence. At the same time, their ideological level will be improved by raising respect for the heroic integrity of sacrifice and deep resentment towards the behavior of villain. The astistical integrity of the whole artical is destroyed by the abridgement, especially the description to the death of Xiang Yu. Its artistic appeal declined and students are able to improve their corresponding ideology level by reading the abridged artical.

**The Last Lecture**

From the 1950s to 2003, the following three paragraphs of Yiduo Wen's *The Last Lecture* were abridged in junior high school textbooks published by the National People's Education Publishing House:

The reactionaries deliberately provoke the contradictions between the United States and the Soviet Union, and they would like to take advantage of this contradiction to trigger a civil war. But no matter how much effort they make, the war does not necessarily happen. Now the meeting of four foreign ministers has been successfully concluded. This is not to say that there is no contradiction between the United States and the Soviet Union but they can compromise. Things are tortuous, not a straight line. Our news channel is blocked, so we do not know the enlightened public
opinions of the U.S. and the Soviet Union, we cannot see the new power among the vast majority of the American people is growing. However, we can see the reflection of facts.

First of all, Stuart is now the US Ambassador to China. He is a friend of the Chinese people, an educator. He grew up in China and received education in the United States. Time he lived in China is longer than in the United States. He is like a Chinese student studies in the United States. We used to meet each other often in Peking before. He is a kind old man who is aware of the real demands of the Chinese people. It doesn’t mean that Stuart is powerful enough to solve all the problems for Chinese people, but that the rise of public opinion of the American people made the change in the U.S.

Second, the reactionaries did not behave properly. At the Foreign Ministers Meeting, China did not mean to convene the Twenty-One Country Peace Conference. This is to show you our attitude. It also proves that the support of the United States is limited. The people's patience and international patience is also limited. [8]

The above three-paragraphs apparently violated some taboo that more heavily guarded in the society than pornography and violence—ideology. As we all know, it did not keep the ideological consistency with another high school textbook at the same period—farewell Stuart written by Zedong Mao. Considering the political situation at the time, it's nothing but to maintain mainstream of the ideological authority for editors to do such abridgement. Now, with the change of times, these contents have been restored in some textbooks. But if the ideology taboo remains strict, and editors' sensitive nerves still tighten, similar abridgement would appear in other articles, which would ultimately do harm to the mainstream ideology itself. A healthy and effective mainstream ideology of a society does not naturally exist by itself. It is not self-evident, and not immutable. It is generated in certain historical conditions and needs to be rebuttoed in the development of society, verified, self adjusted and constantly updated. It requires the implementers and defenders of mainstream ideology to establish an open system of ideology education via displays rather than instilling. As for Chinese classes that bear the function of political education, editors should at least show the artistry of their own inter-textual system so that students can voluntarily accept the mainstream ideology by inquiry and comparison. At the same time they could be educated as rational Ideology carrier, which would constantly promote the improvement and development of ideology. Specifically to Yiduo Wen’s The Last Lecture, the intertextuality phenomenon between Zedong Mao’s Farewell, Stuart and the Last Lecture, in fact, is a unique carrier of an open system to take out mainstream ideology terms. To abridge and deliberately conceal this phenomenon, is truely coward and short-sighted, honestly pitiful. Even just talking about The Last Lecture, such abridgment also undermines the complete artistry of the full text, and thus takes away the opportunity for students to raise their ideological realm. According to parties recall [9], the last lecture of Yiduo Wen was a veritable impromptu speech. The abridgement of the above three paragraphs leaves people such a feeling that the whole lecture is brutal persecution to reactionaries with extreme anger and intense emotion. Of course, such courage and passion are already remarkable. So even without these three paragraphs, this work is still a moving chapter. However, if recover these three paragraphs, we will find that Yiduo Wen still managed to calmly analyze the reality under such anger, whole ability comes from daily personal experience and speculation. This gives his speech a rhythm of relaxation and a rational structure. It not only gives readers deeper emotional infection, more importantly, inspires people with reasons to encourage their independent thinking to reality, rather than being passionately incited up and become blind followers to some ideology. Therefore, if the full artistry of this article is remained, students will improve their state of mind.

Summary

In summary, it is too sensitive for editors of the Chinese textbooks from primary school to college, to abridge articles out of pornography, violence and ideology reasons, as elaborated in this paper the abridgement in Moonlight over the Lotus Pond, Trapped in Gaixia and The Last Speech. On the surface it is to protect the physical and mental health of students and to maintain the
authority of the mainstream ideology, but in fact such abridgement destroyed the integrity of the outstanding works and thus students can not overcome the tabooed ideological content and achieve a higher level of ideological realm by learning the abridged articles.

References


