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The Suffering of Times: Description of Nanyang Female in Yuan Shang Cao’s Fiction

Fan Pik Wah, Chong Yew Reei

Abstract: Yuan Shang Cao was a well-known Malaysian-Chinese male writer. His fictions mainly focus on the descriptions of women living in Nanyang during 1950s-1960s. The Nanyang society (Malaya) back then, people’s education level was low and lack of consciousness about their human rights, and this led to the tragic fate of the female. Yuan Shang Cao’s characterization of women in his works has reflected the issues of the prevailing society and the destiny of women. This paper attempts to analyze the Nanyang social environment then and the form factors through the different female characters in fictions by Yuan Shang Cao’s, to finally discuss the concern towards women by the senior Malaysian-Chinese writer.

Keywords: Mahua Literature; Yuan Shang Cao; Consciousness; Femenism; Multiple Oppressions

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Introduction

Yuan Shang Cao¹ was a well-known Malaysian-Chinese writer during the mid-

¹ Yuan Shang Cao was born on November 5, 1922. During the wartime, he wanted to return China to join the army, but in vain. After that, he wished to further his studies in China and also failed. Anyway, he persisted and contributed in arts and literary more than 50 years. In 1978, when the Malaysian Chinese Writers Association established, he was elected as the first Chairman. He passed away on October 13, 1999.
silence.

Xiumei has been actively sought for her own happiness. However, the male lead because of his identify and occupation as a “teacher”, he does not admit that he actually love Xiumei. Later, he heard that Xiumei engaged, and then he feel eager seeing her and send the last wishes to her. After a few years, the teacher returns to the small town but everything have changed. He heard that Xiumei cannot wait for his appearance and reluctantly married to other. Finally, he left sadly with “countless tears in his hearts”.

Summary

Yuan Shang Cao's fictions have been widely welcomed by the readers during that era. It was mainly because most of his fictions were related to the daily lives of the people. He was good at creating a distinctive character from the grass-roots of society which was close to the lifestyle of his readers. The contents and characters in his fictions reflected the Nanyang Chinese community, conditions of economic, living standards and consciousness of the people in the 1950s and 1960s. There were many different female characters in Yuan Shang Cao's fictions, they barely received education, lack of awareness and they knew nothing regarding their own human rights. All these were the factors which led to their frustrated fate. Yuan Shang Cao as a Chinese concerned about his community and ethnic group. His did not only concern about the people's daily lives but his concern also including education and culture. Although being male, but he spoke up for female and encouraged them to fight for freedom and independence. This was really commendable especially in the society then.

Most of the fictions by Yuan Shang Cao were explored to the Nanyang women's psychological state. They were generally dependent on men to survive and their abilities have always been undermined in the patriarchal society. On one hand, they wanted to make a change in their lives, but on the other hand, they were acquiescent and succumbed to their fate. This psychological state formatted a special personality trait which included both the characteristics of the times and the characteristics of region. The local fictions of Malaysian-Chinese Literature which emphasized on reality reflected the daily lives of the people who were living at the bottom of society. The depictions of the characters in the fictions were very close to the authors’ own lives. In other words, the real-life experiences of the authors have more or less been infiltrated in the contents of the fictions. Therefore, the memories of life of the authors can be found by the readers through the authors' literary works.