

## Intertextual Interpretation of Lu Xun's Works in the Context of Literary Education

Lei Ji

School of Chinese Language and Literature, Northeast Normal University, Changchun, Jilin Province, China

**Keywords:** literature education; Lu Xun's works; intertextual interpretation.

**Abstract:** The interpretation and teaching of Lu Xun's works in literary education has always been a hot issue in the field of Chinese language education. In recent years, in view of problems emerged in the process of teaching Lu Xun's works, the academic circles have carried out a number of innovative researches from the perspectives of educational significance, chapter selection and teaching strategies. Lu Xun's works have a certain kind of internal consistency. Meanwhile, the thought of criticizing national character runs through his novels, prose and prose poems. In the past, teachers usually focused on the explanation of single chapters. The separation which harms the internal unity of Lu Xun's works should be changed. Through breaking through the boundaries of literary styles such as novels, prose and poems, and summarizing characters' features through the intertextual interpretation of different works, teachers can classify figures into different groups and cultivate students' aesthetic consciousness as well as thinking abilities.

### 1. Introduction

Lu Xun is the greatest writer in modern China. His works began to appear in Chinese textbooks since the Republic of China. From Sheng-tao Ye to many Lu Xun researchers nowadays, many scholars have devoted themselves to the study of the selection, interpretation and teaching of Lu Xun's works in schools. However, the reality is that Lu Xun's works involve many historical backgrounds and contain a large number of metaphors; primary and middle school students have difficulty in fully apprehending his works. Starting from the intertextuality in Lu Xun's works with different styles, this paper tries to provide another method to interpret Lu Xun's works in literary education.

### 2. The Teaching Significance of Lu Xun's Works in the Context of Literary Education Debate

It has been 20 years since the great discussion on Chinese education in 1998. Great changes have taken place in the social context and cultural environment during the two decades. At the end of the 20th century, intellectuals pay more attention to the loss of humanistic spirit in the field of education; a peculiar phenomenon appears. People who participated in the discussion of Chinese education at that time, such as Li-qun Qian, Shao-zhen Sun, Fu-ren Wang, Qing-bing Tong, Min Zheng, Xi-qing Liu, Yuan-hua Wang and Zhe-cun Shi, were all scholars concerned the cultural orientation of contemporary China. The author analyzes why these seemingly "layman" scholars in the field of Chinese education are more willing to criticize the current Chinese education, and contribute to the innovation in Chinese education. The following two reasons are found.

The first reason is the habit of free literary criticism. At the end of the 20th century, the main participants of the debate on Chinese education were basically experts in literary criticism. Therefore, when they were exposed to the rigid interpretation of literature in the Chinese classroom of middle schools for decades, they naturally found the gap between academic research and text interpretation in the Chinese education of middle schools.

The second reason is that, these researchers were assimilated by research content. Literary researchers in contemporary and modern China tend to be assimilated by the context of era. "Where is China going" was the ultimate question that lingered in the hearts of the enlighteners in the New Culture Movement. That feature was reflected in all fields of culture, literature and ideological

reform at that time. Zhi-qing Xia once pointed out that, when he studied modern Chinese literature, he was often touched by the feeling of compassion. This spirit of “worrying about country and citizen” was the most important quality of modern Chinese literature. Therefore, researchers at that time usually held critical attitude towards Chinese education.

After the discussion of Chinese education at the end of the century, some changes have taken place in Chinese education in middle schools. Many opinions have even been adopted by Chinese curriculum standards. The interdisciplinary research can make a difference. 20 years later, we should ask following questions. What is the status of literary education? In basic education, do students appreciate the beauty of words, literature and culture? In the latest round of Chinese curriculum reform, “core Chinese literacy” becomes a hot topic. How can we implement the four concepts of “language”, “culture”, “aesthetics” and “thinking” in the core literary from the perspective of literary education? These problems need to be studied urgently. The interpretation and teaching of Lu Xun’s works can be an ideal starting point.

Since the birth of modern Chinese textbooks, Lu Xun’s works have occupied the leading position. Because of his lofty position in the history of literature, Lu Xun’s works have been complied in the textbook system as classical articles for a long period time. But at present, the attitude of middle school teachers and students towards Lu Xun’s works strongly contrast the cognition on Lu Xun’s works of scholars in academic circles. The latest edition of Chinese Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 edition) has been promulgated. It advocates “speculative reading and expression” as well as “whole book reading and discussion”, and puts forward higher requirements for literary education and cultural infiltration in Chinese curriculum from the definition of core literacy of Chinese subject to the organization of learning task groups. The ultimate goal of literary education should be the sublimation of “thinking” and “culture”, as well as the improvement of students’ thinking quality and the formation of students’ sound personality at the end of basic education. Following questions must be asked. Can we carry out “critical reading” activities without mentioning Lu Xun? Can we explain greatest humanitarian sympathy and the most painful and profound souls in literary works without explaining Lu Xun’s works? Can we construct cultural elements in literary education without the teaching and learning of Lu Xun’s works? By exploring the interpretation of Lu Xun’s works, we can find the way to realize the significance and goal of literary education.

### **3. Advances in the Interpretation of Lu Xun’s Works in Literary Education in Recent Years**

The study of Lu Xun is an important issue in the study of modern Chinese literature. In recent years, many people have come to the fore. The study of interpreting Lu Xun’s works from the perspective of literary education has also been quite distinctive in recent years.

After 2010, scholars on Lu Xun study began to focus on the interpretation of Lu Xun’s works in Chinese education. In 2015, the Basic Education Committee of Lu Xun Research Association became a branch of the Chinese Lu Xun Research Association. On that basis, many studies on the interpretation of Lu Xun’s works began to appear in textbooks. This kind of research can be found in works of Li-qun Qian, Fu-ren Wang, Shao-zhen Sun and other scholars. Articles on the intensive reading of Lu Xun’s works are too numerous to mention one by one. Typical papers include Shao-zhen Sun’s Contradictions between Lu Xun as an Essayist and Lu Xun as a Novelist, and Fu-ren Wang’s The Loss of Spiritual “Hometown”: An Appreciation of Lu Xun’s Hometown. In Interpretation of Lu Xun’s Works in the Middle School, Li-qun Qian explained these works through the way of analyzing specific topics. The method broke the limitation of the previous teaching mode of focusing on single chapters. A series of studies based on this method also provides the idea of compiling Lu Xun’s works in textbooks.

At the same time, the research of Lu Xun’s works complied in Chinese textbooks entered a new stage. The research is participated not only by textbook editors and experts on Lu Xun research, but also by many primary and secondary school teachers. Issues like whether Lu Xun’s works should be deleted, which works should be selected into textbooks, and how to turn the teaching direction of Lu Xun’s works under the background of the new curriculum are often discussed. Shu-yu Chen

published the paper, *Spread the Seeds of Lu Xun's Spirit: Lu Xun in Textbooks*; Zhi-chuan Gu wrote the article, *The Rational Selection of Lu Xun's Works in Textbooks*; Wei-dong He published the paper, *New Curriculum, New Textbook and New Lu Xun: Probe into Problems on Lu Xun in Middle School Chinese Education in the New Century*. In recent years, with the upsurge of interest in Mandarin education in the Republic of China, more and more studies have focused on the compilation and interpretation of Lu Xun's works in textbooks of that period. Xian-tao Zhao wrote *Lu Xun's Works in the Textbooks of the Republic of China*.

Secondary school teachers' strategy research on the teaching and learning of Lu Xun's works also began to emerge. Some excellent Chinese teachers' understanding of Lu Xun's works has reached a certain height. Typical research fruits include, *Correct Understanding of the Educational Value of Lu Xun's Works* written by Dong-sheng Wang from the High School Affiliated to Nanjing Normal University, and Pei-dong Xiao's *Teaching Reading from Student's Stand: A Case Study of Pei-dong Xiao's Class on Blessing*. Compared with the Chinese course in middle school, the curriculum reform in primary school is more vigorous. A series of valuable studies emerged, such as the group reading activities of "close to Lu Xun" in the Attached Primary School of Tsinghua University. The group reading integrates articles of *My Dad is So Old, But I am So Young*, *One Encounter* and *The Master and Print*, which provides a train of thought for the teaching of Lu Xun's works in middle school.

The interpretation of Lu Xun's works from the perspective of literary education still has room for further exploration, and the intertextuality of Lu Xun's works is a key to the interpretation of Lu Xun's works. Many Lu Xun research experts and excellent Chinese teachers in primary and secondary schools have realized this point, but there is still no systematic research on this issue.

#### **4. Establishing an Intertextual Interpretation System for Lu Xun's Works**

In recent years, much attention has been paid to the concept of "style" in the study of literary education, and it is advocated that the teaching content should be explored after the stylistic characteristics are determined. In fact, Lu Xun's novels, essays, prose and prose poems often annotate each other. The boundaries of style should be neglected in the interpretation of Lu Xun's works. After reading *Revenge*, we will naturally understand the three avengers of Lian-shi Wei in *Lonely Man* and the metaphorical symbol of "eat your own heart" in *Inscription on Tomb*. There are numerous examples of mutual annotations. This is because Lu Xun's thoughts include his philosophical speculation on Chinese history and human nature. Without a holistic understanding, we cannot grasp the essence in Lu Xun's works. Therefore, the teaching of Lu Xun's works should be a unified whole, and the integrity should be apprehended from a certain perspective. The intertextual interpretation of Lu Xun's works is that perspective.

After the promulgation of the Chinese Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools in 2017, the term "learning task groups" appeared in the public as the highlight. Compared with the past teaching mode focuses on single chapters, classroom teaching mode under the concept of "learning task groups" is more inclined to thematic reading and group text reading. Before the curriculum reform, Li-qun Qian had taught Lu Xun's works in the High School Affiliated to Nanjing Normal University in a special way. This is a basic method for researching writers' works in universities, but is rarely seen in primary and secondary school Chinese classes. In fact, due to the profound complexity of philosophy and ideology in Lu Xun's works, it is not suitable for "deep and thorough" teaching in middle schools. Some senior middle school Chinese teachers think that the prosperity of Lu Xun's research is a kind of "interference" to middle school teaching, which is worth pondering.

The author believes that Lu Xun's works should be interpreted horizontally and vertically in accordance with the requirements of the new curriculum standards, the acceptance of students, the basic viewpoints of university research circles and the viewpoints of famous Chinese teachers in middle schools. Horizontal interpretation includes three major groups.

First is the group of "onlookers"

Sheng-tao Ye pointed out in *A Sentence in Yi-ji Kong* published in 1949 that, "the author did not

write Yi-ji Kong for the purpose of ‘making people happy’ and ‘making people laugh for a few times’; profound criticism and infinite sympathy can be found between the lines.” The group of onlookers is the essence of Lu Xun’s criticism on the spirit of national character. He engaged in literature while giving up medicine in order to change the indifferent and numb personality traits of the Chinese people. Therefore, this character group appears in almost all his literary works. In terms of textbook selection, many novels, essays and prose poems, such as Yi-ji Kong, Blessing, The True Story of Ah Q, Medicine, as well as chapters which are not included in textbooks, such as Public Expose, Madman’s Diary, The Ever-burning Lantern, A Lonely Person, What will Nora Do after she Left, Revenge, The Essay under the Lantern and Random Feelings, have formed the relationship of intertextual interpretation. If we do not start with the spirit of criticizing the national character, it will be difficult to carry out thematic or group reading.

Second is the group of “sufferers”

This group of characters gathered many images of the sufferers of that era. They suffered and did not realize the suffering under the pressure of social conventions. Especially after 1925, the ebb tide of the enlightenment movement and the dissolution of their colleagues caused a great blow to Lu Xun. It is precisely because of this that profound Wandering and Wild Grass were created. The image of sufferers becomes even more tragic in comparison with “onlookers”, such as Mistress Xiang Lin, Yi-ji Kong, Mama Chang, Run Tu and Ah Q. Among them, Ah Q is both an “onlooker” and a “sufferer”, so the image is extremely complex. It needs to be interpreted in connection with the full text of The True Story of Ah Q. Close reading, full text expansion reading and intertextual interpretation should be integrated in the teaching process, in order to help students understand the connotation of The True Story of Ah Q. Many of Lu Xun’s essays (such as My View on Moral Integrity) are also annotations to these characters, which must be used for reference in the classroom.

Third is the group of “enlighteners”

Beginning with the Theory of Cultural Bias, in Lu Xun’s ideological system, the concept of “human” is composed of “individual” people and “group” people. Among them, “individual” and “group” people are always in confrontation. People group in are “onlookers”; “sufferers” and “enlighteners” are individual people. However, the group of “enlighteners” obviously has a sense of tragedy and solemnity. Enlighteners, including Lu Xun himself, chose to “resists despair” in works like Such Soldiers and Grave. That image is well represented in these articles. Therefore, Lian-Shu Wei in A Lonely Person, Yu Xia in Medicine, Zi-jun in Grieve the Deceased, the madman in Madman’s Diary and The Ever-burning Lantern, men and women with bare bodies and sharp knives in Revenge, as well as He-zhen Liu all belong to the group of “enlighteners”.

In literary education, the teaching of Lu Xun’s works should break through the stylistic boundaries, interpret the groups of these three types of characters in depth and intertextually. At the same time, the idea of “criticizing the national character” should run through the horizontal goal to change the current teaching situation of focusing on single chapters.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, literary research cannot exist independently. It is bound to be intertwined with the research on thought and cultural trends of the society; it is bound to be reflected in the field of education, especially in Chinese education. In the study of literary education, we should not neglect the infiltration of the cultural and ideological attributes of literary works, which is especially true for works created by great thinkers like Lu Xun. When teaching Lu Xun’s works, teachers should grasp the feature of intertextuality and establish a coordinate system to interpret different figure groups and analyze the author’s spirit of criticizing national character. This system can not only provide relatively fixed teaching objectives from a broad perspective of Lu Xun research, but also refine teaching themes and make them suitable for middle school students’ thinking abilities. At the same time, the basic reading methods of close reading and group reading can also be applied to give full play to the role of Lu Xun’s works in literary education.

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