The Exploration of National Values in Chinese Children Literature Take Jasper Grasshopper for Instance

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Abstract:
Chinese children's literature is an integral part of Chinese history. Its various forms of subject matter and different styles never stopped influencing the generations of the Chinese children. As a carrier of adult’s thoughts reflecting the history of China and its people’s values, Chinese children’s literature has several distinct national features. Indeed the Chinese people in general, show similar values and attitudes towards life to a certain extent. This article takes the Han fairy tale Jasper Grasshopper, analyzes and discusses Chinese traditional values and core values based on the former researcher’s definition and classification of national values. It aimed at providing a new perspective for the better understanding of children's literature's potential impact on children's psychological development, so as to create a better human environment and development direction for children's healthy growth.

Key words: Chinese children's literature, values, children, psychology

Introduction:
“Children's literature is a kind of literature that draws attention to children's spirit and their psychological development (Lee, 2017)”, it is a carrier that bears the educational mission, and at the same time, it also shows distinctive geographical features while telling a story for its strong social and cultural imprint. Whether myths and legends, passed down orally, or through the multitude of printed books, Children's literature in China like children's literature all over the world, has never been divorced from social values. It has reflected adult experiences and expectations for children through plot settings, characters, fate and other factors. China's history is long and complex, with many ups and downs. Chinese culture, based on politics and economy, has undergone tortuous development, which allowed children's literature to reflect the values of the Chinese people in different historical periods, with a focus on current history and the growth and change of ideology. This distinctive national character is not only reflected in the contrast between Chinese children's literature and children's Literature around the world, but is also reflected in the different styles of the works of minority people. It plays a pivotal role in the formation of children's values.

In a previous study, Wang (2003, 2015) not only...
explored the development and evolution of children's literature and views of the role of on children, but also showed the blend of history and literature based on the analysis of children's novels. Zhang (2012) expounded the unique national spirit in children's literature of the minority nationality children's stories. Her essay titled “Children's Literature Nationality” (Zhang, 2016) took the minority nationality novel “My Little Honey Alpaca” (Little Seven, 2014) as an example, and carefully analyzed the uniqueness of national character in children's literature and its related issues of creative practice.

These studies mainly discussed the forms and characteristics of children's literature. As to which related to the study of children's literature in the view of values, in addition to the scholars we have mentioned above, there is also Lee (2017), Wang (2013) etc. Their works have discussed Chinese children's literature’s value orientation of their own beyond the children, and have taken foreign works as an example, to discuss life values in children's literature (Wang, 2013). But the national values of Chinese children's literature, still need to be further supplemented.

The Chinese Fairy Tale written by Huang (1955), adopted from another Chinese fairy tale book edited by Zheng and Gu (1989) in 1980s, took ten distinctive stories from more than 100 fairy tales which were edited, expanded and enriched. These stories come from different ethnic groups, reflecting the normal life and universal values of the Chinese people from the characters’ including ideas, habits and customs to their words, deeds, and clothing. This article takes the story Jasper Grasshopper from the book (Huang, 2014) as an example, to explore the national characteristics of morality and value concepts in Chinese fairy tales and reveal its influence on children, so as to make a modest contribution to the study of national values in Chinese Literature.

**Connotation of National Values:**

1. **The Definition of National Values:**

Max Weber (1864 – 1920) thinks “nation” means “ethnic group” such as ethnic minorities, ethnic policies, ethnic colleges, including race, ancestry, language, culture, religion, customs and common migration etc. It is a relatively small group outside of the mainstream status of culture in the larger society. (Hou & Zhang 2006). China is a small nation compared to the world and in this article, the word “nation” is used in the sense Weber assigned it.

In addition, Kluckhohn (1951) defined the values as the view of “an implicit or explicit opinion about what is”desirable”. “It is the characteristic of individuals or groups which affect people’s choices of behavior, means and purpose.” (Yang, 1998)

While national values are “The values formed from different ethnic minorities with regional characteristics and national characteristics based on their their history, culture, mode of production, customs, geographical environment and other factors.” (Hou & Zhang, 2006).

To sum up, that is to say, national values refer to the choice of behavior, means and purpose of the ethnic groups.

2. **National Values and Their Connotations:**

In the book Introduction to Chinese culture (Zhang & Fang, 2012), when discussing the development of Chinese traditional culture, the author mentioned that the Ancient Chinese demonstrate their own values through the understanding of the relationship between nature and humanity, group and individual, righteousness and corruption and so on. They are embodied in the values of Confucianism, Taoism, and Mohism. Based on this, Ge (2016) summed up the essence of China traditional values as “cherish life”, “harmony”, “profit group” and “justice”. “Cherish life” is embodied in the attention to the human nature and the value of life; it was seen as “benevolence”, noble character in Confucian theories. “Benevolence” has two meanings: kindness and justice. There is an explanation of benevolence in the Baidu Encyclopedic Dictionary which states that when you see someone in trouble, you reach out to help him; when you are blessed, you share your fortune with others. "Harmony" means "the unity of heaven and human" which stands for the "harmonious coexistence between man and nature". "Profit group” emphasizes the
relationship between groups and individuals. Zhang (1996) has a description of this relationship: "Confucianism thinks that the group is higher than the individual; spiritual value is higher than the material value. Mohism emphasized personal sacrifice and Taoism advocated individual spiritual freedom. The Mohist affirms that the groups are more important than the individual but Taoism holds the opposite opinion." Mohist's theory holds that "to promote the interests and expel the evil in the world" is a typical representation of “maximizing the interests of the community” as one’s goal. "Justice" is the choice between “interests” and "righteousness" after a balance in the face of interest one should pay attention to the basic moral standard, so does the quote "a gentleman loves money, but gets it in a proper way” show this opinion.

In the “Core Value and The National Soul”, Wang (2015) pointed out that Chinese traditional values born in the time of Fu Xi, at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty, were created with the establishment of values such as "advocating morality and protecting people". From the Spring and Autumn Period to the Qin and Han dynasty, morality was based on three cardinal and six Confucian principles and was gradually established. It established the basic criterion for human relations. After the turbulence of the Wei and Jin dynasty, the philosophers created a new theory of value, the internal transcendence and cultivation of the mind. In the the Ming and Qing Dynasties, after a long time of advocating and practicing, loyalty, filial piety, chastity, righteousness, kindness and politeness etc became the common values. After the Opium War, Sun Yat-sen combined the old and the new morality and put forward the value of "benevolence, faith, peace, loyalty and filial piety". In Wang’s eyes, this is a comprehensive summary of Chinese traditional values and also the core concepts of modern Chinese values. In modern times, society’s core values still are the traditional values of "providing benevolence, valuing the people, being honest, respecting justice and pursuing harmony". Brave, hardworking, dedicated and friendly are the characteristics which lead to "prosperity, democracy, civilized and harmonious society” and have been highly advocated for a long time.

In the study of traditional Chinese ethical values, Hou (2008) pointed out that “the core of a national culture is the values identified by the nation...values of different ethnic minorities have both shared and distinct values. He took the Laku and Miao minorities as examples and analyzed their values. Many traditional values are folk customs themselves or expressed in various forms of folklore. During Xinmi Festival, the Laku people will use new rice to sacrifice to the gods, ancestors, dogs and tools, reflecting their gratitude. In the myths of Laku people, "curse will come home to roost", "more charity and less evil" etc were reflected by ending the struggle between animals and the gods. The characteristics of Miao minority are traditional values of mutual cooperation, collectivism, respect the old and cherish the young, were their main value position. These values have much in common with the main values we have mentioned above, and showed a similar character between minority values.

In addition to the above-mentioned scholars, Lin (1995) discovered the value of "seeking virtue, seeking kindness", "introspection" and "patience" from the analysis of Chinese proverbs more than 20 years ago. Also, Xu (2004) provide an interpretation of the nation’s value orientation from the perspective of Chinese language. From the use of self-depreciatory expression to the ways of expressing politeness, he analyzed the "underestimation of self worth value", "respecting the high status value" and "men are superior to female value". In the book of Faith: the home of the human spirit, Feng(2000) pointed out that “mythical legend explains nature, reflects the relationship between man and nature, showing the development of early human history and what constituted ancient ethnic culture. Through it the hero makes history, establishes the criteria used to determine the behavior of human society, and the measure of value and life goals. It creates the image of a hero through the heroic person's deeds and heroism. It determined the standard of conduct, the value scale and the life goal for human society at that time.” In fact, it is not just the myths and legends of heroes,
The national values of The Jasper grasshopper:

1. Introduction of Jasper Grasshopper:

The Jasper grasshopper tells a story which happened on Loess Plateau in north Shanxi, China. There was a village located on Hetao land. The lands most of the farmers were cultivating belonged to a landowner named “Parsimony Lee”. He treated his workers badly to the extent that almost everyone lived in poverty regardless of how hard they worked. Lu’s grandpa and his father died from constant overwork and left debts they had failed to pay to little Lu. Under the pressure of Lee, Lu started to work for him from ten years old. Once, when he was tending to the cattle, the little Lu broke his leg by accident and lost all the cattle belonging to Lee. All of sudden, he fell into deep despair and wanted to commit suicide. An old man showed up right then and stopped him. He gave him a jasper grasshopper painting and told him to be unremitting. With the help of this painting, Lu was able to predict the weather. He helped a lot of people in the village but also attracted Lee’s attention. Lee took away the painting by offering Lu to offset the debts in exchange, but the grasshopper in the painting turned into a girl and came back and married Lu. Lee’s son wanted the grasshopper girl too, so Lee came to Lu and forced him to wager. With the help of his wife, Lu won the wager while Lee broke his leg and became crippled for the rest of his life, and ended up losing almost everything.

2. The implied values in the jasper grasshopper:

2.1. Traditional Values:

We have known that “cherish life” is mainly reflected in two aspects: showing care for humanity and value your own life. Caring for humanity comes from two sources: oneself and others. Little Lu was occupied by getting rid of the debts so he could barely take care of himself. But the author let the moon’s reaction is even more sensitive,”she weeps at every glance of him”. Although Lu slept with the cattle and working through the night from time to time, he is not alone. Things around are considerate of him, they care about him. After Lu got the painting, once he predicted that there would be rain. He told his blind mom to stay at home but his mom still went out just to warn all the neighbors about the weather. This is a typical kind of care for others depicted specifically by the author. When Lu felt hopeless, a series of psychological trauma made him no longer see the meaning of living. He picked up a stone and was about to commit suicide. But the old man showed up right then and stopped him. He said:” All suffering has an end, all the good people will be rewarded.”Lu said:” I did everything I could to pay the debts, but the interest never decreased. On the contrary, it has been growing all the time. I really can’t see the end of this.” Then the old man brought out the painting to Lu, the painting changed his life completely. He saved Lu and also conveyed an idea to the readers: even in the most desperate situation there can be fortunate circumstances waiting for you, so one must refrain from doing anything desperate.

2.1.2 Harmony:

According to the exposition of “The Outline of Chinese Traditional Culture”, harmony, in Chinese traditional values, particularly refers to the harmony between human and nature. The farmers and Lee had a different reaction to the weather and it brought different consequences. The “harmony” concept was wrapped up in those consequences and explained implicitly. Lu told everyone it would rain. He told all suffering has an end, all the good people will be rewarded.” Lu said:” I did everything I could to pay the debts, but the interest never decreased. On the contrary, it has been growing all the time. I really can’t see the end of this.” Then the old man brought out the painting to Lu, the painting changed his life completely. He saved Lu and also conveyed an idea to the readers: even in the most desperate situation there can be fortunate circumstances waiting for you, so one must refrain from doing anything desperate.
Lee did not mean to go against the weather, but even so he was punished by severely. In the story, the writer has a very detailed description of the scene:

“The wind roared, uprooted the thick roadside poplar trees. They made a turn above the land and were dropped violently half a mile away from the beach. The wheat just cut down, rolled out of the yard or had dried but not been transported into the barn, was all scattered by the storm. Flying and frolicking from east to west, neither a gasp nor a shout could bring them back. The rain soon became dense and oppressive, like someone poured water from the sky. The farmers and cattle could not open their eyes. They were running around as if they were blinded and failed to find a place to hide. The rain on the ground flowed into the river, the river turned into an ocean and wrapped up Lee's wheat flows from all sides. The land was like a giant mouth, which ate out all of Lee’s wheat in the whole season. There was almost nothing left.”

It was a heavy rainstorm, and if you were still farming before the storm, you would end up losing everything. There is no specific description of how the farmers prepared, but one still feels bad for Lee’s loss even though he was the villain in the story. Mencius once said: "The grain will be plentiful without violating the season of crop cultivation, management, and harvest.” The principle of “nature has its own regularity, whoever against it will be destroyed” was incisively and vividly explained. To succeed one must obey the “rules of nature”.

2.1.3. Profit group:

Profit group means “benefit the group”. As we discussed before, the idea of “promoting good and expelling evil in the world” is a concept used for people to make the interest of the group as their own. Lu got help from the old man through the ability to predict weather, and thus brought benefit to the whole village. That is “promoting the interests of the group”. On the other hand, Lee got into trouble constantly: he lost his wheat, and the grasshopper in the painting. His son became a lunatic and he himself became crippled. Amassing a large karmic debt, Lee had to pay for his sins and represented the evil that had to be expelled. This is the embodiment of the concept of “profit group” of the story.

2.1.4. Value Justice:

When a writer praises a quality, he tends to give this quality to the protagonist, or give the opposite quality to the antagonist. Lee is a typical venal person. We can see that from two of his actions: first, as a usurer, after Lu lost his grandfather and father, instead of forgiving the debt, Lee asked Lu to work for him only paying him a thousand coins a year to pay off the two million coin debt. (we can see that Lu will never be able to pay off the debts); second, after knowing about Lu’s painting, he made a promise that Lu could pay off the debts using that painting but later on he broke his promise and threatened Lu to take Lu’s wife for his own son. In the pursuit of profits, Lee had no principles. He could do everything just to get what he wanted. His ending is a punishment for people like him. It conveys the idea of “value justice”.

2.2 Core Values:

2.2.1. Loyalty, Filial Piety, Morality, and Justice:

“Zhong xiao jie yi” (忠孝节义) is a phrase that is comprised of four different aspects: loyalty, filial piety, morality and justice. Lu worked hard to meet Lee’s requirements, the cattle became stronger and fatter every passing day and births were on the rise every year. He never loafed on the job, and was never absent from work. He had complete loyalty to his employer. “A dutiful son is obliged to pay his father's debts.” Lu never complained about the debts. Instead, he devoted himself into working for six years and taking care of his mother “Give me time, there will be a day you could enjoy life”. This is filial piety. When Lee came for the debts the day Lu turned to ten years old, Lu showed no fear of the bullying. He even said “one can be poor, but cannot lose their will.” He accepted the rules and made a promise “I will do everything to make sure it will be done well” and kept that promise. That is morality. When Lee broke his promises, taking away Lu’s painting and even his wife, Lu didn’t
take revenge. He obeyed the rules and stood up to Lee, managed to keep his wife by his side and finally defeat Lee. That’s “justice” in the writer’s eyes.

2.2.2. Industrious and Courageous:
There wasn’t too much description of Lu’s bravery but we still can feel that from his sense of responsibility. The author put a lot of emphasis on his diligence. Obviously, what he has done was too much for a ten year old kid. It says, “He gets up while the stars are still there and comes back when the moon showed up every night. During the day, he would carry two pancakes for lunch. His work was tending to the cattle, and storing crops. When it got dark, he would drink two bowls of corn porridge for dinner and set up the cattle pen. After sleeping for two hours, he would get up and add more grass to the cattle crib for them to eat. After another two hours of sleep, it will be the time to get up.” This was foreshadowing to the transition later on.

It shows a common concept: the harder you work, the luckier you may be. Today’s effort won’t be in vain. There will be an end of the days of suffering.

2.2.3. Equality:
In Chinese, there is another phrase: “gui bu ao jian” (贵不傲贱). It means whoever at a higher position should not abuse those in a lower position. Lee is an opposite example of that. The story used him as an example of one who does not follow this ideal.

“The houses of the ordinary families were built by the Loess Plateau. The roof was made by ryegrass. It couldn’t bear the rain in summer and couldn’t block the wind and snow in winter. It looked like a sick chicken staying in a rough roost from far away. Lee’s house is another story. The wall was built of black brick and its bridge was made of boxwood. They painted the giant gate red and put paper cut on windows for decoration. Food supplies were piled up in his warehouse; even the dog they have is fat and idle. When the dog sees people, it’s so lazy it does not bother to open his eyes.” Let’s see how Lee treated the others:

“He gave others the worst land to cultivate and collected the highest rents from them. When others brought him the wheat, he would take what little wheat they had. So in the end, to be able to pay rent, the farmers had to conform to a vicious cycle of endless poverty.”

Before New Year’s Eve “Lee’s home was full of the atmosphere of Spring Festival. They made meatballs, and steamed rice cakes. Dumplings were varied by the filings. The fireworks wrapped up by the red paper were hung on the roof ready to be lighted.” When Lu finished a year’s work and ask Lee for his salary, Lee said: “What pay? Let me tell you this. The money you have earned already paid the debts. Last year you owe me a million coins, the interest is one hundred thousand coins. Your salary counteracted ten thousands coins and there is a million and ninety thousands coins left on the debt!”

After Lu came back home, this was what was waiting for him: “the brick bed covered by a shabby mat, bran porridge made by Lu’s mother, and the oil lamp which was about to be extinguished by the wind, leaving a shaking shadow like a ghost on the wall.”

Now let’s see Lee’s fate:

“Did Lu save Lee? Yes, he had. But Lee broke one of his legs and was crippled. His son went mad, running around at home with the paper cut of grasshopper girl in his hand and always saying ‘beauty, beauty’. Everything going on in this family is like a circus now.”

From the fate of the characters we can see that “equality” is the most salient value the story wants to show. What happened to Lee is not only a comfort to the readers but also serves as a warning to those who do not follow the rules of equality: “people must respect each other, the strong should not bully the weak, the many do not rob the individual, the rich do not insult the poor, the noble do not defy the lowly and the smart do not cheat the fool.” [From Mo-tse.]

Conclusion:
The jasper grasshopper use the conflicts between landlord and tenants as the main topic, created characters like Lu Sheng, Parsimony Lee and grasshopper girl etc. It showed struggles which
people have gone through in order to make a living or even just to survive. The characters came from different classes, their suffering was a reflection of social reality. And the way they talk, the way they act as well as their personality and fates reflect some Chinese values from different perspective. It is better to take this story as a realistic children novel rather than a Chinese fairy tale.

From The Jasper Grasshopper we can see that because China has a long history and united by various minority nationalities, people’s values formed over a long time, and developed many things in common. They’re rooted in Chinese traditional culture and have been influencing generations for many years. No matter “cherish life” or “brave and diligent”, you can find them all in ancient Chinese books. The Analects of Confucius etc. The Ancient Chinese thought these values are the most noble. The book “The Taoist Scripture of San Tian Nei Jie” (三天內解) says this: “the dead king is inferior to the living mouse. So the saint asks people to be nice to the living creatures. Life is valuable!” As to interests and justice, Confucius said: “the gentlemen values justice and vile men value interests”, “riches and honors acquired by unrighteousness, are to me as a floating cloud.” In ‘Quotes of nations’, chapter of Lu said: “working makes people think, thinking promotes kindness; leisure makes people promiscuous, if they are promiscuous, evil will be the outcome.” It showed the importance of diligence. In addition, The Analects of Confucius has the quote “richness and nobleness are the things everyone wants, but if one earned them in the way they shouldn't have, then they couldn’t enjoy it.” This quote is a brief generalization of justice. In the myths from Laku minoritypeople, the values “be kind, avoid evil, curse will come home to roost” is common. You can also find them in the stories of The Han nationality. Although the passing of time will promote the new values to come, the main values will have a deep influence on literature. There is no doubt that this will have a profound impact on young readers. The chosen story Jasper Grasshopper is a small sample of Chinese children literature. It is a typical Chinese fairy tale but the values it reflected upon are limited. Influenced by the historical background, the personality of characters are not absolutely representative. In stories, most landowners were portrayed as squeezers and the toilers usually were kind and diligent. This story is not an exception. The future researchers should choose stories from different time, areas and nations to compare, analyze and study. So, they can further explore and discuss the values showed in children literature. With a better understanding of literature’s influence on children’s growing up, we can create a better cultural environment for children’s spirit and psychological development.

References:


