

# The Symbolist Style of Lu Xun's Novel “White Light”

Rui Zhang<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Chinese Languages and Literatures, Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, Gansu 730000, China

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding author. Email: zhangrui21@lzu.edu.cn

## ABSTRACT

Lu Xun's short story "White Light" has a unique significance in the intellectual genre. The article will explore the internal value and external system of intellectuals in the late Qing Dynasty from the perspective of symbolism, interpret the real situation of intellectuals under the imperial examination system, and explore Lu Xun's ideological state when observing people and writing about things. In the cyclical pursuit and disillusionment of the protagonist Chen Shicheng's hope, the author uses symbolic techniques to interrogate the soul through mental illness, further expressing the thirst for hope in the process of hope disillusionment, including questioning and criticizing feudal ethics and imperial examinations. This expression technique benefits from the inheritance and reference of Chinese and Russian literary creation methods. Starting from the imperial examination system, people can see the loss of personal value of intellectuals under the orthodox ideology, the gap between intellectuals and the people, and as intellectuals in the May Fourth New Culture, what kind of mentality and skeptical attitude did pioneers like Lu Xun view the social situation at that time, thus revealing the emotional and spiritual difficulties faced by intellectuals who called for enlightenment during the May Fourth period.

**Keywords:** Lu Xun, "White Light", Symbolism, Sense of wilderness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lu Xun's novel "White Light" was first published on July 10, 1922, in the 19th volume, 13th issue of the Shanghai Oriental Magazine, and later included in the novel collection "Scream". Among Lu Xun's many texts, "White Light" did not receive high attention. There is also very little textual research related to it. In early research works on Lu Xun, such as Li Changzhi, Wang Furen, Qian Liqun, etc., "White Light" was often mentioned as an ordinary novel in the collection of "Scream", and there were few dedicated sections discussing its literary value. Even some critics believe that "White Light" appeared as an immature work by Lu Xun. In the post-war study of Lu Xun in Japan, "White Light" did not receive the same level of attention as texts such as "The True Story of Ah Q" and "Wild Grass". In the Chinese academic community after the new era, attention to this novel still occupies a minority position. Upon closer reading, the novel "White Light" is actually an innovative work by Lu Xun that combines

traditional Chinese novel techniques with Western symbolism. Therefore, it is extremely important to clarify the deep and multi-layered meaning of this novel.

Based on relevant research in China and foreign countries, there are roughly three trends in the study of "White Light". One type is the criticism from Chinese scholars such as Li Changzhi, Wang Furen, and Qian Liqun since the birth of the novel, who believe that this novel mainly opposes the feudal imperial examination system and criticizes the teachings of Confucius and Mencius and the traditional Chinese literati. Another type is the psychoanalytic analysis conducted by foreign scholars such as Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik and Maruo Nagayoshi on the distortion of people's mental state and the personal values of intellectuals under the feudal system. Finally, in recent years, Chinese researchers have mainly understood "White Light" from the perspectives of narrative and psychoanalysis. These analytical methods apply emerging theoretical perspectives to study

this modern work, and the overall research theme is limited to the criticism of feudal imperial examinations and the analysis of the protagonist's spiritual subject after being persecuted. In fact, in "White Light", Lu Xun uses a unique literary style and dual techniques of symbolism and realism to not only depict the loss of personal value of imperial examination personnel under the dogmatic system of feudal imperial examination, but also provide the protagonist with spiritual understanding and sympathy. Most importantly, it implies Lu Xun's writing motivation, that is, the problems faced by May Fourth intellectuals at the intersection of the old and new worlds. On the one hand, they need to bravely break free from the old swamp of traditional feudal culture, and on the other hand, they need to figure out the future development path of their nation and country among many new and complex ideas, cultures, and political propositions. "White Light" uses the story of Chen Shicheng to express Lu Xun's own difficulties, suffering, and confusion.

## 2. THE SYMBOL OF HOPE: INHERITANCE AND REFERENCE

"Symbolist literature is the earliest and most influential school of modernist literature, regarded as the boundary between classical literature and representational literature. The basic characteristic of this genre is to use symbols to imply the development of ideas and things in the work, especially the author's inner truth. Symbolists extract themes from mundane things and transform decay into wonder."<sup>1</sup> Lu Xun had early exposure to the Western Symbolist literary trend and was influenced by symbolist works such as Chukawa Shiramura, Baudelaire, and Turgenev. This influence can be seen in "White Light".

Lu Xun's novels often involve the theme of characters' mental illness. The protagonist Chen Shicheng in "White Light" ultimately becomes insane, which is related to his pursuit of fame and fortune. In order to achieve this pursuit, he is willing to sacrifice his emotional life, interpersonal relationships, and even his life. In the midst of great hope and the great disillusionment of hope, Chen Shicheng's spirit finally experiences hallucinations, and his extreme longing intensifies his life process of physical and mental destruction. In the text, Lu

Xun twice refers to Chen Shicheng's long-awaited future as the "sugar tart". This "sugar tart" is a symbol of hope in Chen Shicheng's heart.

The first time this symbol of hope appeared is when Chen Shicheng stands alone in front of the screening wall of the testing institute. The people around him have dispersed, but he has been searching for so long and still hasn't found his own name. At this moment, his expression has already begun to wander, thinking of the dreams he has been dreaming of for so many years: after achieving fame and fortune, the gentry would cling to him, the common people would respect him, and the house would be brand new... In an instant, it turned into a bubble. His life journey, which he had designed, once again comes to a halt at failure. However, his dream and bright future as a candidate for the imperial examination are not the political aspirations of Confucian intellectuals to seek a peaceful and prosperous life for the common people, but rather to be sought after by the powerful and respected by the poor, driven by self-interest and greed. This indicates that during the times of national crisis, the core values of some scholars during the Wuxu period of the late Qing Dynasty were still confined to personal gain, which went against the original Confucian culture of soldiers taking the imperial examination to serve the country and love the people. Lu Xun not only describes the common psychology and dreams of this group of imperial examination candidates, but also criticizes the fundamental errors of this psychology. "His usual plan for a suspended future suddenly collapses like a damp sugar tower, leaving only a pile of fragments. He unconsciously rotated his body, which felt scattered, and walked back home in a daze."<sup>2</sup> The long-cherished hope was shattered, and Chen Shicheng's mental state has changed. The "scattered body" is the spiritual pillar that had been shattered by the impact. Under this heavy blow, he had no choice but to step back home.

The second time the author describes the collapse of the "sugar tart" is due to Chen Shicheng's indifference and ridicule from the "spectators" after returning home. The book boys showed a look of "underestimating him".<sup>3</sup> After taking the imperial examination for sixteen times,

1. Lv Weimin, Wang Guoming, On the Basic Characteristics of Symbolist Literature [J]. Journal of Zhengzhou University: Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition, 1996(4).

2. Lu Xun, "White Light", Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p570.

3. Lu Xun, "White Light", Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p571.

he has failed all and even felt like "a group of chickens are laughing at him".<sup>4</sup> The expression of this synesthesia is clearly projecting the protagonist's mentality, which is similar to the skepticism of the madman in "The Madman's Diary" who thinks, "Why is that Zhao's dog looking at me."<sup>5</sup> "He sits down again, his eyes shining brightly; he has witnessed many things, but they were vague - a collapsed sugar tower like future lay before him, which only widened and blocked all his paths."<sup>6</sup>

The strength of this hope, the sweetness and grandeur of this "sugar tart", ultimately made it impossible for him to let go. In the years of hope and anticipation, he has formed a persistent attachment to this "sugar tart" forged by fame and fortune, symbolizing a great future. The imperial examination became his belief, and thus he embarks on a pursuit of his inner demons. Despair drives the emergence of new hope, and the pursuit of new hope inevitably leads to disappointment again. Most of the intellectuals in Lu Xun's novels have a persistent psychological characteristic. In disappointment, Chen Shicheng remembers the riddle his grandmother had told him about the treasures hidden in the Chen family's ancestors, and couldn't help but search for the place pointed to by the riddle.

At this moment, the typical symbolic image of "white light" that Lu Xun sent to this text has appeared. The main characteristics of symbolism are symbol and implication. White light has become a symbol of wealth and hope, guiding Chen Shicheng towards the path of rebirth. This road shines brightly and seems to contain infinite power, creating the protagonist halo in traditional Chinese novels for Chen Shicheng. The use of this symbolic image is clearly related to the influence of ancient Chinese legends and supernatural novels on Lu Xun. In Chinese mythology, "white light" symbolizes wealth. For example, Chang'e found the immortal medicine Glossy ganoderma grass because of white light in her flight to the moon. At the same time, "white light" is also endowed with the hope of eternal life. Of course, using white light as a

symbolic object also implies a futile and futile illusory hope.

It completely alludes to Chen Shicheng's actual actions from pursuing fame and fortune to his madness after hope was shattered, from being a symbol of wealth to becoming a illusory entity. It seems to have paved the way for Chen Shicheng to escape from the human world and embark on an eternal path to heaven, reigniting the character's great hope. This illusory inflated body lures Chen Shicheng towards the final stage of his life in pursuit of great hope. Although the reality is that the mysterious white light in his eyes is actually the constantly moving moonlight. At this moment, the moon becomes a symbol of the protagonist's loneliness and helplessness in a cold, lonely, and unattended environment. It sways and drags, "casting cold light waves" at Chen Shicheng<sup>7</sup>. From the cold light wave (daily situation) to the brand new mirror (returning light) and then to the mysterious "iron moon shadow" on Chen Shicheng's body (death ending), it implies the changes in Chen Shicheng's life state before his death. After peeling the lantern flowers in the room a few times, they gradually extinguished, "the left oil has burned out",<sup>8</sup> symbolizing that Chen Shicheng's life has come to an end.

He follows the direction of the white light towards the mountains, and the "West Peak" also "stood upright like a black and charming tablet, emitting a huge shimmering white light around it".<sup>9</sup> As the long board held by ancient ministers during court meetings, the tablet was a symbol of that official position. This "white light" is far away in the sky, yet it seems to be right in front of him. Chen Shicheng falls into mental confusion in a state of returning light. His words and actions have already diverged from the gentle and refined image of traditional literati, and the awakening and shattering of his self-awareness have merged into one, producing tremendous energy that collides with each other, and his body and mind have reached a highly tense state.

"The terrifying cry of 'Open the city gate!' carries great hope, and in the dawn in front of the

4. Lu Xun, "White Light", Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p571.

5. Lu Xun, "White Light", Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p444.

6. Lu Xun, "White Light", Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p571.

7. Lu Xun, "White Light", Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p572.

8. Lu Xun, "White Light", Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p574.

9. Lu Xun, "White Light", Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p574.

West Gate, it tremblingly cries out like a wisp of hair.”<sup>10</sup>

As described by Lu Xun, this shout carries great hope. It can be seen that in texts such as "Kong Yiji" and "The True Story of Ah Q", the author has given the last hope in life to the bottom level characters who are about to go insane. In this great hope, these people all fantasize about being able to live with dignity and dignity in their ideal world. Even fantasies have given these people momentary happiness in the illusory world. He endows the lower class with this dream of great hope, allowing them to break free from the confines of the material and spiritual worlds and enter an ideal state of free expression and unrestrained freedom. "This is a transcendence of the reality of 'life's hardships', and also the realization of the life force of freedom that humans may possess."<sup>11</sup> But in reality, the dreams and hopes of such ordinary people are ultimately unattainable. So there is also "terror" in the great hope, which is equivalent to hope, and is the protagonist's heart wrenching despair that cannot compete with reality. The devastation of ordinary people by feudal ideology and system is the origin of this "mournful voice".

Chen Shicheng walks towards illusory immortality and the death of individual life in a resolute farewell to the past. The ideal of fame and fortune that he carried on him, the traditional path of seeking officialdom that followed the rules, and the inner cultivation that he had been taught by Confucianism for many years gradually dries up under the extreme pursuit of wealth. Lu Xun directly exposes his greed and hypocrisy in this posture of shouting and running towards the white light. Even if Chen Shicheng could pass the imperial examination, his future would be easily reminiscent of provincial candidate Ding Juren who succeeded in the imperial examination. Ding Juren's contempt and suppression of Kong Yiji, who was also an intellectual, has become a new feudal power. People's respect for those who "wear long robes" is more about their respect for power and money. Cultural knowledge became a cross class ticket in ancient Chinese society. "Once it loses its function of receiving 'power' and 'money', it becomes useless."<sup>12</sup> Lu Xun has deeply understood the

psychological changes of feudal intellectuals under the heavy pressure of the imperial examination, and even presented the real living conditions and ultimate fate of imperial examination candidates from a realistic perspective through various symbolic images. The author's narrative emotions in "White Light" are sad, indignant, regretful, compassionate, sincere, and also carry a helpless lament. Chen Shicheng's loud shout is clearly a double disintegration of the body and spirit of a persistent person full of great hope under feudal forces. "Open the city gate" is not only Chen Shicheng's call, but also the call of intellectuals at that time to resist stubborn old forces and find new ways out.

Regarding the use of symbolic techniques, Lu Xun was not only influenced by the traditional Chinese literature mentioned above, but also gained many creative inspirations in Russian literature. His innovation in novel style and creative techniques has contributed to the exchange between Chinese new literature and world literature. When Lu Xun was studying in Japan, he made great efforts to translate and introduce works of weak ethnic literature and Russian literature. The former is because, like China, they are both struggling ethnic groups under colonialism, and there are analogies and inspirations to draw from; In the latter, "although Russia is an independent and powerful country, it has become a focus because the people are striving for freedom and launching revolutions,"<sup>13</sup> became the object of Lu Xun's translation and study exploration. Lu Xun learned the techniques of symbolism from Russian writer Andreyev.<sup>14</sup> Andreev's "works are mostly symbolic",<sup>15</sup> as evaluated by Volovsky, Andreev "focuses on social issues with a painful heart and evaluates them with a despairing pessimism."<sup>16</sup> Andreev is skilled in using symbolic techniques to create and is an outstanding symbolist writer. "Dark night" and other symbolic images are typical in his writing. Lu Xun's use of symbolic images such as night and moon cannot be separated from the influence of Andreyev. Lu Xun believes that in Andreyev's works, "there is a serious realism as

13. Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun's Youthful Era, 12, Tokyo Again [M]. Zhong Shuhe ed., Yuelu Press, October, 2020.

14. Li Jianjun, Half is the ultimate, half is the partial interpretation - On the Intersection of Lu Xun and Russian Soviet Literature [J]. Literary Controversy, 2019(08).

15. Lu Xun, Complete Works of Lu Xun (Volume 10) [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p201.

16. (Russia)Vorovsky, On Literature [M]. Cheng Daixi, et al. trans., People's Literature Publishing House, 1981 edition, p313.

10. Lu Xun, "White Light", Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p575.

11. Qian Liqun, The Exploration of the Soul [M]. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, October, 2014.

12. Wang Furen, The Narrative Art of Lu Xun's Novels [J]. Modern Chinese Literature Studies, 2000(04).

well as depth and delicacy, which harmonizes symbolic impressionism and realism... His works, although very symbolic and impressionistic, still retain their realism.”<sup>17</sup> This is also pointed out in this article that in the creation of "White Light", Lu Xun uses symbolic art to express the shell, but in terms of content selection, he belonged to the true realism school. The application of symbolism is also Lu Xun's innovation in the writing style of Chinese novels after the emergence of Chinese new literature, which has promoted the integration of Chinese literature and world literature.

The use of symbolic imagery in "White Light" is similar to the first type of symbolic works classified by Sun Yushi in "Wild Grass", which "uses symbolic natural scenery and atmosphere to create a symbolic world that implies the author's thoughts and emotions, whether it is real or imaginary natural scenery.”<sup>18</sup> The "dark night" in "White Light" is a world of terror and chaos, symbolizing the old world where Chen Shicheng parasitizes. He came from the old world and ran towards it as the end of his life. This dark night also inspired later generations to fight between death and life, despair and hope, break through the unknown fear, and find the light that illuminates the night. The need for social criticism and expression during the May Fourth period also determined the inevitability of the emergence of symbolism in the history of new literature.<sup>19</sup> Lu Xun was burdened with such a critical responsibility, which also promoted his recognition of the value of symbolism.

Li Changzhi believes that the shortcomings of "White Light" lie in its concise language, with few outstanding aspects and even falling into the ordinary realm, especially the plot of Chen Shicheng walking into the mountains, which is too simple and slightly obscure. According to Zhou Zuoren's description of character prototypes and the comparison with Lu Xun's texts, Lu Xun did indeed omit some of the protagonist's death process, but this is precisely the expression technique of removing reality and preserving symbolic meaning. In just a few strokes, the final ending of the characters is depicted, with a focus on the symbolic meaning of the ending, reflecting the implicit

meaning of the work. The "White Light" still embodies Lu Xun's consistent writing style, which is calm and composed. This is not the ease with which the story takes place, but the ease with which it is written. The author has full confidence and can handle his pen with ease. His calm and composed pen conveyed "his most passionate, indignant, passionate, and sympathetic emotions to the extreme"<sup>20</sup>. He Zhiyou, who once wrote a comic strip for "White Light," commented on Chen Shicheng in this way<sup>21</sup>: "There is a difference in the way ancient people discussed the heart and the path of the lower class character Chen Shicheng. We can already see the criticism and satire of him both inside and outside the work from his life struggle trajectory. But if we look at it from the perspective of the heart, 'He has already died for the imperial examination and feudalism, and his clothes have been stripped off. Why should we kick another foot?'"<sup>22</sup> In Lu Xun's novels, small characters such as Mistress Xiang Lin, Madman, Kong Yiji, and Ah Q mostly end up struggling against fate and heading towards their own brightness and ideals through resistance. Chen Shicheng is unwilling to be rejected and runs away like a "white light" in his heart, which is also a rebellion against his disappointed fate. Under the devastation of the imperial examination system, Chen Shicheng ultimately embarked on a path of physical and mental destruction. This path is cruel, and the people who walk this path are even more pitiful. People should sympathize with the many people who are persecuted by the system and whose value and even their lives cannot be guaranteed. They are the victims of the times, sounding the alarm for future generations with their lives, alerting people to the oppression and enslavement of people by feudal ideas and systems. This alarm bell will alert the world from ancient times to the present day.

### 3. THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF "EXCAVATING TREASURES"

The prototype character of the novel, Zhou Zijing, repeatedly excavates and believes that there is silver hidden in the place where the white light rose. According to Zhou Zuoren, this belief is also based on some foundation. Because at the

17. Lu Xun, Complete Works of Lu Xun (Volume 10) [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p445.

18. Sun Yushi, The Life Philosophy and Symbolic Art of Lu Xun's "Wild Grass" [J]. Luxun Research Monthly, 2005 (6).

19. Zhu Shoutong, On the Initial Wave of Symbolist Literature during the May Fourth Movement [J]. Journal of Nanjing University (Philosophy, Humanities and Social Sciences), 1998(3).

20. Li Changzhi, Lu Xun Critics [M]. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, April, 2014, p77.

21. Yang Jianlong, On the Interpretation of Lu Xun's "White Light" by He Youzhi's Comics [J]. Luxun Research Monthly, 2016 (10).

22. Jiang Weipu, Wang Su, Appreciation of Comic Art [M]. Shaanxi Education Press, 1996 edition, p196.

beginning of the play, it is necessary to perform the act of "excavating treasures". First, a flame is set off, and then a flayer is used to dig up, and gold and silver ingots are unearthed."<sup>23</sup> In addition to the legend of Zhou's mansion, it is said that as long as one can understand the meaning of "one pull away from the well, one line away from the eaves" (in the novel, it is changed to "left bend, right bend" and other three lines, and there are indeed two wells in Zhou's mansion), one can find the location of the treasure. "The children of a fallen family all want to get rich, but after hearing this riddle, they cannot start, so they have to give up. Only Zijing is not only interested but also very confident, repeatedly trying to dig inside the Blue Gate."<sup>24</sup> He is convinced that wherever there is a white light rising, there will be treasure. The premonition of this white light was also presented in Lu Xun's novel "White Light".

In "The Entanglement between 'People' and 'Ghosts': An Analysis of Lu Xun's Novels," Maruo Nagayoshi also made an analysis of Chen Shicheng's belief in excavating treasures that echoes Zhou Zuoren's. From the perspectives of folklorism, historical verification, and psychoanalysis, "The novel 'White Light' is not only modeled after the tragic figure of Lu Xun's great uncle, Zijing, but also written as a satirical work that imitates and transforms the celebratory dramas 'Tiao Kui Xing' and 'Excavating Treasures' deeply immersed in the imperial examination system."<sup>25</sup> He pointed out that there are various "ghosts" in the "Mulian Opera" in Shaoxing, Zhejiang, including the "imperial examination field ghost". The imperial examination field ghost holds a book and pen, walks unsteadily to show the various embarrassing situations of a down and out scholar, and finally commits suicide in the examination room. It is easy to arouse the interest of children in Xintaimen amidst the laughter of the common people. Because the scene ghosts are performing the true appearance of countless scholars around them. The "white light" in the novel is similar to the "fire breathing" of the "ghost" in "Mulian Opera". It is believed that the protagonists of "White Light",

23. Zhou Zuoren, Characters in Lu Xun's Novels · 79 · Excavating Treasures [M]. Zhong Shuhe ed., Yuelu Press, October, 2020.

24. Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun's Old Family · 19 · White Light [M]. Zhong Shuhe ed., Yuelu Press, October, 2020.

25. (Japan) Maruo Nagayoshi, The Entanglement between "Human" and "Ghost" - an Analysis of Lu Xun's Novels [M]. Qin Gong, trans., Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, April, 2010 edition, p75.

Chen Shicheng and Kong Yiji, have overlapping "ghost" figures on their bodies, and both of them are the "examination field ghosts" captured by Lu Xun<sup>26</sup>. He also pointed out that the novel framework of Lu Xun's "White Light" and the mode of character appearance are influenced by traditional rural drama.

Combining Lu Xun's own experiences with those around him, it can be seen that although he came from the literati class, he witnessed the tragic fate of scholars in the social environment where the imperial examination system was the only way to make a living. The tragedy caused by the imperial examination resulted in personal tragedy and tragedy for the common people. Lu Xun used these examples as material to warn the world to end the "cannibalistic" feudal imperial examination system, establish a new system, create a new social environment, and cultivate new independent intellectuals. In this way, there is hope for a strong rejuvenation of the country and the nation. He pondered on the way out for intellectuals through years of observation and personal pain.

The Zhou Zijing portrayed by Lu Xun is a prominent example of a scholar under the imperial examination, but at the same time, it is also a coincidence of many images in the author's mind, including the overlapping prototypes of many characters of "Zhou Zijing". He is a mixture of his own and others' examples, supplemented by techniques such as symbolism in literature. The reason why Lu Xun chose these lower class individuals in society, tragic figures who are about to be abandoned by the times, is because of his compassion for those who live a miserable and miserable life. Most of the characters in his novels are based on real life, and the suffering and helplessness of these people have become a lingering shadow in Lu Xun's heart. He wants to speak up for them, shout for them, even if their lives inevitably perish in the cruel social environment. He wants to sing the tragic song of this little person on the stage, so that more people can see the scenes of this struggling little person struggling for survival. Lu Xun once translated and praised the works of the Russian realist writer Alzbasiv, and saw the greatness of the Russian people from his works full of despair. Lu Xun's writing also reflects the character and demands of

26. (Japan) Maruo Nagayoshi, The Entanglement between "Human" and "Ghost" - an Analysis of Lu Xun's Novels [M]. Qin Gong, trans., Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, April, 2010 edition, p76.

the people. His collection of materials from ordinary people in the social environment was undoubtedly the precursor to the literary movement at that time. He seems to be examining the development of this society, but in fact, he has already immersed himself in social movements, breathing with the times, and reflecting the times and people's demands together with literature. There is a clear resonance between the material story and the call of the times in 'White Light'. This is not an accident, but rather his genuine perception of life, his genuine feelings towards the times, and his expression of the true self synchronized with the social changes of the times. This is the unique feature of a literary writer with a philosopher's perspective.

#### 4. PIONEER'S SENSE OF WILDERNESS

Maruo Nagayoshi once pointed out that "White Light" uses the framework of the Qingzhu drama "Excavating Treasures" in Shaoxing's "Mulian Opera" to satirize the social system, environment, and characters at that time. What supports this pragmatic satire is "the contempt and pity for the values that have been institutionalized by the ruling ideology of traditional society."<sup>27</sup> Lu Xun asked people to face up to the fact that "Chinese people have never fought for the price of 'people'".<sup>28</sup> The imperial examination system is no longer a simple mechanism for selecting talents, it has slowly evolved into a huge cage that erodes people's temperament. Intellectuals may initially have had this extremely positive and people-oriented value system, but over time, they were blinded by the utilitarian mentality brought about by the imperial examination, and gradually lost their adherence to and recognition of self-worth. Once they suddenly fail to pass the imperial examination or leave the system, they will lose the support and guidance of their spiritual beliefs, and the effective way to seek fame and fortune. As a result, they will also feel sad about the realization of their life values.

The imperial examination system ensured the independence of the intellectual class, and the outstanding individuals selected from it became the

most recognized talents by the authorities. Intellectuals formed in this situation usually blindly seek upward mobility through the imperial examination system, which creates a significant difference in their identity recognition from ordinary people. The gap between intellectuals and commoners is far. If one day some of them achieve official positions and fame through the imperial examination, they may even stand in a position hostile to the lower class people, and their social practice activities will gradually be isolated from the people. In "White Light", it can be seen that the reason why Chen Shicheng dreamed of passing the exam was not because he wanted to "establish his heart for heaven and earth, establish his destiny for the people, inherit his ultimate knowledge for the future, and create peace for all eternity", but because he wanted to become a wealthy official, climb the ranks of the gentry, be respected by the common people, and build a brand new house of glory and wealth. It can be seen that his values have been severely distorted under the imperial examination system. He represents the dream of some imperial examination candidates, whose bright future is to be admired by the wealthy and respected by the poor. It is to transcend class and decouple from the common people. Lu Xun not only depicted the common psychology and dreams of some imperial examination candidates, but also criticized the filthy mentality of intellectuals who read not for the dawn of the people but for their own selfish interests. Through "White Light", Lu Xun expressed his anger and contempt for the unreasonable cultural system that dominated the behavior and thoughts of ordinary people in the old society. When Lu Xun criticized and broke through the barriers between intellectuals and working people brought about by the imperial examination, he also faced the problem of finding and establishing new ways for intellectuals to closely connect with the people. At this time, the May Fourth New Intellectuals represented by Lu Xun were no longer pursuing official career "upward", but were striving to "downward" and closely unite with the people, consciously taking on the historical responsibility of awakening their thoughts and spirits.

As a May Fourth intellectual wavering between tradition and modernity, Lu Xun also constantly doubted and pondered his own situation in affirmation and negation. He is also struggling under immense social pressure. Although the imperial examination system was abolished in 1905, the path of self-reliance for Chinese intellectuals

27. (Japan) Maruo Nagayoshi, *The Entanglement between "Human" and "Ghost" - an Analysis of Lu Xun's Novels* [M]. Qin Gong, trans., Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, April, 2010 edition, p76.

28. Lu Xun, *Grave · Casual Writing under the Lamp, Complete Works of Lu Xun(Volume 1)* [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p212.

had just begun. And in the huge cracks of the transition between old and new, they also face confusion and numerous obstacles. On the one hand, he was troubled by the isolation of feudal intellectuals from the people under the old social system, and on the other hand, he was worried about the difficulty of "finding a way" to establish a new value system. "Lu Xun's novels, on the one hand, expose the fragility of knowledge and spiritual poverty of intellectuals, and on the other hand, repeatedly depict the 'isolation' and 'loneliness' of new intellectuals who aim for self-reliance."<sup>29</sup> During the May Fourth Movement, there was a chaotic and even somewhat nihilistic spiritual phenomenon. "The frustration of the teachers was wandering between the old and the new, while the pain of the students was at a loss in the face of various new ideas."<sup>30</sup> The literary spirit and temperament of writers during the May Fourth Movement were unique compared to other stages of Chinese writers. Most of the intellectuals in their novels "do not possess strict artistic image meanings. They do not exist as 'personalities', but as the storage, embodiment, and expression of certain spiritual phenomena and life feelings."<sup>31</sup> And these stories are often linked to the author's own experiences, which may seem purely personal.

A person's proposition, if not responded to by anyone, neither receives praise nor opposition, is the most disappointing. "It is like being in an endless wilderness, with nothing to do."<sup>32</sup> This sense of wilderness no longer only refers to the loneliness and solitude in the hearts of intellectuals, but also to "an awakened person with advanced consciousness and a sense of historical mission, who recognizes the desolation of the survival situation and the illusory existence of life in the face of the absurdity of values and the indifference of history."<sup>33</sup> Just like the old woman and passerby in "The Trembling of the Decayed Line" and "The Passerby", "she walked all night, all the way to the

boundless wilderness";<sup>34</sup> "The passerby stumbled into the wilderness, with the night following behind him."<sup>35</sup> It is a dual dilemma and crisis that reality and spirit bring to people.

The main plot of "White Light" takes place at night. Whether it is the portrayal of pitch-black night in realism or the use of dark night as a symbolic image by Andreyev, in Chen Shicheng's pursuit of the trace of white light, Lu Xun presents us with the fear, loneliness, and sense of wilderness in the tranquility of this dark night. This sense of wilderness is not only the artistic conception presented in the novel, but also the presentation of the protagonist's sense of wilderness when facing great hope and fear. It reflects the author's own sense of wilderness as a pioneer in the transition between old and new cultures, mixed with unknown fears and hopes. "Carefully savoring 'The Scream' and 'Wandering', one can almost feel the desolation of this pioneer's history everywhere." [36] Chen Shicheng's burial in the pursuit of "white light" is also a reflection of the author's inner sense of wilderness. In this sense of wilderness, people can see the restoration of the historical stage and the dilemma of characters in history. The sorrowful novels written by Lu Xun in "The Scream" and "Wandering" have a common bright ending. He still needs to "know it's impossible and do it". His story strives to destroy the dark forces from feudalism, pointing the way out and hope towards the future after destruction. Like the wreath on Xia Yu's grave, the madman's hope for a world that doesn't eat people, and the hope in "Hometown" that people will have a way after walking too much.

The tragicomedy in Lu Xun's novels is infused with reflections on "value", although many are "torn apart", the hope still lies in "reconstruction". This is also in line with the spirit of the May Fourth Movement to "re-evaluate all values". In the destruction of the old dynasty and the exploration of the new system, with a spirit of skepticism, the sacred coat of the feudal system is stripped off, and even the true face of the "worthless" intellectuals under the imperial examination, such as Chen Shi, is restored. A sharp contrast and satire are made between the truth and falsehood of value, and a

29. (Japan) Maruo Nagayoshi, *The Entanglement between "Human" and "Ghost" - an Analysis of Lu Xun's Novels* [M]. Qin Gong, trans., Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, April, 2010 edition, p82.

30. Xu Jilin, *From Doubt to Belief: The Spiritual World of Two Cohorts of the May Fourth Intellectuals* [J]. *Tianjin Social Sciences*, 2020 (05).

31. Zhao Yuan, *The Image of Intellectuals in Novels during the May Fourth Movement* [J]. *Literary Criticism*, 1984(03).

32. Lu Xun, *Complete Works of Lu Xun (Volume 2)* [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p224.

33. Zhu Qizhi, "Wind and Thunder" and "Wilderness": A Comparative Study of Textual Imagery between Gong Zizhen and Lu Xun [J]. *Seeking*, 2002(02).

34. Lu Xun, *The Quiver of the Decadent Line, Complete Works of Lu Xun (Volume 2)* [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p210.

35. Lu Xun, *The Passerby, Complete Works of Lu Xun (Volume 2)* [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p199.

36. Qian Liqun, *Exploration of the Soul* [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, November, 1999, p280.



skeptical tone is used to ask, "Is it true that it has always been like this?"<sup>37</sup> "Being both confident and skeptical has become a common mental symptom among May Fourth intellectuals."<sup>38</sup> Lu Xun's use of ordinary people from the lower classes as literary subjects was a "precursor to the literary movement that followed. Unconsciously, he had already reflected the demands of the times and breathed the breath of the era".<sup>39</sup> In terms of material selection, he doesn't care about revolutionary literature, popular literature, or popular literature. He chooses literary themes that are closely related to him, emotionally pulled, and used to dispel loneliness and respond to the times. Although "White Light" appears to depict the tragedy of the imperial examination system for old intellectuals, it actually views the relationship between intellectuals and society from the perspective of historical development. At the same time, Lu Xun uses this to relieve his own distress and confusion in reality, and stated that every person in the development of history has an inescapable responsibility for the future development of the nation and the country.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Chen Shicheng was oppressed by the feudal imperial examination system and lost his divinity, losing his subjectivity. Lu Xun was his loyal illustrator. Under Lu Xun's sympathetic, critical, satirical, and mournful writing style, the image of intellectuals before the end of the old era is vividly portrayed on paper. In terms of material selection, "White Light" closely follows real events around us, while utilizing the narrative style of ancient Chinese novels such as 'The Scholars' and symbolic methods from legendary novels. It uses the 'model separation method' to create distance between characters from a divine perspective, and clearly and objectively narrates the fate of the protagonist. In terms of expression techniques, based on realism, drawing on Chinese and Western literature, supplemented by symbolism, the story's meaning is extended. In terms of ideology, with the help of Chen Shicheng, a literati during the imperial examination era, people can see the barriers in the hearts of the May Fourth intellectuals themselves,

37. Lu Xun, A Madman's Diary, Volume 1 of the Complete Works of Lu Xun [M]. People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, p451.

38. Xu Jilin, From Doubt to Belief: The Spiritual World of Two Cohorts of the May Fourth Intellectuals [J]. Tianjin Social Sciences, 2020 (05).

39. Li Changzhi, Lu Xun Critics [M]. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, April, 2014, p60.

the confusion, mission, sense of responsibility, and sense of wilderness at the intersection of old and new cultural ideas. As Weigelin said, "White Light" is a work with multiple implications, multi-layered meanings, and intricate structures. The novel provides an in-depth analysis of intellectuals who are caught between tradition and modernity, material and spiritual interests, and death and immortality. It is necessary to attach importance to the analysis of the structural principles and stylistic features of "White Light", restore the historical context and understand Lu Xun's novel from the perspectives of literature and the times.

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