

An Analysis of the Evolution and Causes of the Image of the Squires in Ancient Chinese Novels

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Abstract

The gentry class is a unique class evolved from the development of feudal society in China for more than two thousand years, which has an important influence on the promotion of Chinese social history and plays an important role in the social governance of ancient China. There are many images of the gentry in ancient Chinese novels. From the Qin and Han dynasties to the Ming and Qing dynasties, the literary image of the gentry experienced a change from positive to negative. This series of changes reflect the changes of the situation and role of the squire class in the social reality. Social change has a certain impact on literature, and the gentry class presents different historical characteristics and social functions in different historical periods. The fate of the gentry class in the historical reality and literary narration may be the historical portrayal of their true image. The crisscross, deviation and overlap between the realistic existence of the squire image and the literary narrative reflect the historical truth to some extent, which enables us to understand the real motivation of the squire image in ancient Chinese novels from many angles. With the help of ancient Chinese novels, combined with the different characteristics of the gentry group in the process of Chinese social and historical development, this paper analyzes its image changes in ancient Chinese literary works, and explores the reasons and cultural connotations behind these changes.

Keywords

Image Change; Literary Shaping; Social Change; Ideology; Social Character.

1. The Meaning of "Squire"

The development of the Squires has experienced a historical dynamic process, and its meaning is constantly evolving. Literally, the word "squire" can be understood as "the gentleman of the country". The definition of the squire is more extensive than that of a gentleman. It not only refers to a person who is knowledgeable and respectable in his native land, but also refers to a scholar who takes part in the imperial examination but does not get the title. In the process of social development, the title of "squire" is also different in different periods. In addition to the words "squire", "gentleman" and "gentry", it is customary to use "gentry", "rural sages", "gentry" and so on.

In *Cihai*, there are many interpretations of "gentry". First, it refers to: "the large belt of ancient scholar-officials tied out of their clothes", "Wei Ling Gong of the Analects of Confucius": "Zi Zhang Shu gentry." Xing Kui Shu: 'girding the waist and hanging the rest as an ornament is called the gentry.' It is extended to refer to the people who bind the gentry. " Second, it refers to "straps". [1] The Kangxi Dictionary explains: "the four civilian scholars are the first." Kong Anguo said, 'Scholars are reasonable officials, and they want to get the truth of their curvature.' " [2] Mr. Yu Yingshi said, "as a special class with a cultural mission, scholars have played the role of 'intellectuals' in Chinese history from the very beginning." [3] then " squire " can be understood as a group of scholars who receive corresponding knowledge and cultural education and have a certain impact on the management of social and public affairs.

The squire is not only the product of the specific historical situation and cultural background of Chinese society, but also the leader in the public power structure of Chinese traditional rural society. Mr. Fei Xiaotong believes that after the collapse of the feudal system before 200 BC, the class of "gentlemen" appeared. They may be "retired officials or relatives of officials, or simply educated landlords." they "help the emperor manage the country, have no kinship with the ruling clique, and only play the role of servants of administrative power, but do not have the power to make policies." [3] They are an important social group in the social stratum of ancient China, and the rule of the squire for thousands of years has constructed the squire culture with national characteristics.

2. The Changes and Characteristics of the Image of the Squire in Ancient Chinese Novels

In the course of the development of ancient Chinese novels for thousands of years, both categories and themes are changing. however, most of the stories are drawn from the folk, and the purpose of creation is to reflect the social life from the record of knowing the path to the conscious arrangement of stories. Therefore, we can peep into the history and society from the ancient Chinese novels, and examine the differences of the images of the squire in different social development periods.

2.1. The Change of the Image of the Squire

Since the Qin and Han dynasties, the theory of immortals has prevailed, and "none of the existing so-called Han novels really comes from the Han people. since the Jin Dynasty, all the literati and scholars have made fake works, and they have not stopped in the Song and Ming dynasties." And it probably depends on saying immortals "[4]. The novels of Qin and Han dynasties have a long history and focus on the description of strange spirits, but some of them still contain descriptions of the literati. Ban Gu said in "White Tiger Tongyi": "there must be a gentleman to wear clothes, showing respect and self-appointment." [5] it can be seen that at that time, it was of great significance for people to wear a gentleman's belt, which is not only for beauty, but also a symbol of a person's moral level, representing a gentleman who is cautious, respectful to others, self-restraint and self-improvement.

In the Sui Dynasty, Yang Jian, Emperor Wendi of Sui Dynasty, established the imperial examination system in order to strengthen the imperial power system. Ordinary people can also become officials through the imperial examination system. In the Tang Dynasty, the imperial examination system was gradually improved, and the scholars who resigned or did not take part in the imperial examination were selected to participate in the grass-roots management, and the gentry system formally appeared. Records of gentlemen also began to appear in the novel, such as the Biography of Nanke Tai Shou, "Lexida County." There are officials, monks, seniors, music, cars, Wu Wei and Luanling in the county to welcome them. " [6] here the seniors refer to the gentry who are old and have a certain status. The improvement of the imperial examination system led to the gradual rise of the gentry class, which became the regulator of the state and rural society, and played an important role in promoting rural governance, balancing state power, condensing social forces and so on. Therefore, the description of the image of the squire in the literary works of this period is mainly positive.

In the Song Dynasty, the status of scholars was more prominent. The literati in the Song Dynasty wrote books in slang and narrated stories, which were called "Pinghua". Some works at that time were also influenced by vernacular. The Old News of the Gentry in Luoyang is a note written by Zhang Qixian in the Song Dynasty, which mainly describes the deeds of the gentry in Luoyang since the late Tang and five dynasties. The Water margin mainly describes the story of the last years of the Northern Song Dynasty, in which Lu Junyi is a typical image of the squire

described by the author. If you are used to using a stick, the dragon has no special skills. The family in the capital is innocent, and Jizu has a rich family. The killing field is in the face of the enemy, rush away ten thousand horses and sweep back a thousand troops. More loyal to the liver, strong Lingyun. Generosity, wealth and righteousness, on the British name spread all over the world. Lu's double name is Junyi, nicknamed Jade Kylin. " in Daming House in Beijing, not only the family is rich, but also the martial arts are strong, with superior social status and social prestige. In the Song Dynasty, while the gentry had a very high social status, most of them had a certain prestige and were convinced by the public. Therefore, because of his fairness, enthusiasm, integrity, prestige and prestige, the local squire became a civil judicial authority in arbitration disputes and played a leading role in the rural public power structure.

The number of the squire class was not very large before the Ming and Qing dynasties, but it was already the main social stratum in the Ming Dynasty. The image of the squire in the Ming and Qing dynasties gradually changed, and the description of the squire in many works no longer adhered to the consistent positive image, but appeared negative description. In the 12th floor, Zhan Bifeng, a squire from Jinhua, Zhejiang Province, dislikes the poverty of Bai Yi and Yue you, and deliberately makes it difficult for him to participate in the imperial examinations in order to obstruct his daughter's marriage to her. The images of Yan Gongsheng, Yan Jiansheng, Zhang Jingzhai in the Outer History of Scholars and Tu Jiansheng in Tongtianle are full of the author's revelation and satire on their bad behavior. The gentry group, as a solid defender of their own interests, actually plays a certain role in manipulating rural grass-roots politics. in order to safeguard their own class interests, it is bound to be accompanied by the exploitation and exploitation of farmers' interests. The negative image of the squire in the novels of the Qing Dynasty, that is, the image of the evil gentry, reflected the general view of the squire and the basic evaluation of their moral behavior at that time.

2.2. The Characteristics of the Change of the Image of the Squire

Through the above carding, it can be concluded that the changes in the image of the squire show the following characteristics.

First, the image of the squire in the novel has the nature of the times, and each era presents different characteristics. During the Qin and Han dynasties, the country gentry mainly recorded the history as a political administrator, and did not make a specific evaluation of the good or bad of the characters. Since the implementation of the imperial examination system in the Sui and Tang dynasties, the image of the squire has increased in the society. however, there are few popular novels in this period, the literary development is mainly legendary novels, and there is little description of the image of the gentry. The vernacular is the main literary genre in the Song Dynasty, and the description of the image of the squire in the novel is mostly the praise of the characters, which plays a role in promoting the development of the plot. The Ming and Qing dynasties was a period of high prosperity of novels, with a wide variety of novel genres, a large number of descriptions of the image of the squire and an increase in the negative description of the squire, which usually reflects the author's criticism and satire of the squire.

Second, the role of the squire has undergone historic changes. With the development of social history, the gentry class has gradually changed from the maintainer of the traditional local order and the practitioner of the traditional spiritual and cultural connotation to the cruel and unbenevolent exploiter. the image of the gentry in literary works has also changed from a manager with a certain social status and reputation to an evil gentry image of exploiting and squeezing the peasant class. The change of the image and status of the squire reflects the change of the social governance structure to a certain extent.

3. An Analysis of the Reasons for the Evolution of the Image of the Squires

By observing the image of the squire in the novels from the ancient Chinese Qin and Han dynasties to the Ming and Qing dynasties, we can find that there has been an obvious change in the Ming and Qing dynasties. As the carrier of social life, Chinese novels reflect the truth of history to a certain extent. As the hope of being a township, the squire should be reserved and protected by the common people. Due to various reasons, the squire has changed in the process of social development.

3.1. The Emergence of the Imperial Examination System

The imperial examination system is an important link in the process of derivation and development of the Chinese gentry, which plays an important role in promoting the development of the gentry. Ordinary people can also get fame through the examination, and the intellectuals at that time regarded the imperial examination as a way to change their destiny, so there gradually appeared a large number of scholars who obtained merit and fame.

3.2. Changes in the Structure of Social Governance

During the Qin Dynasty, the "township pavilion system" was implemented at and below the county level, and the people who managed the "township pavilion" were mainly officials, supplemented by folk recommendations, and used the power of the people to govern the society. The Song Dynasty implemented the "baojia system". Since the Ming Dynasty, the power of the gentry class has gradually expanded, and its prestige and privileges have attracted many people from the lower class, some of whom can even empty the power of local officials and gradually alienate from the lower class.

3.3. The Downfall of the Gentry Class

3.4. The Impact of Small-scale Peasant Economy

The development of commercial economy and new education broke the balance between urban and rural areas in Chinese society, the depression in rural areas threatened the privileges of the gentry class, and the abolition of Small-scale peasant economy and private ownership of land made the gentry class lose their foundation for survival.

The above reasons led to the continuous decline of the social status of the squire class in ancient China, the soil for the existence of the squire class was gone, and the grass-roots level was no longer needed for national governance. The "prestigious" folk can no longer represent the interests of the people, they oppress the people, indulge themselves, do harm to the people, and finally meet people's dissatisfaction, and the status of the country gentry in the hearts of the people gradually decreases. The country gentry has been the maintainer of social order since ancient times, and the revolution lies in breaking this stability and constructing a new order. Therefore, the historical torrential rain of social reform is bound to have a fierce collision with the gentry class. Because the gentry assumes the role of maintainer of traditional morality, culture and society, as well as the dependence on the traditional society, in the surging tide of social reform, they inevitably play the role of "villain" in the novel.

4. Conclusion

Society affects literature, and literature reflects society. In the process of social and historical development, the change of social structure is basically synchronized with the change of literary content. When we return to the text, we return not only to the text itself, but also to the social organism in which the text took place, hoping to find a profound opportunity for the development of literature and history. The changes of the social value and literary image of the gentry class reflect the changes of the psychological process of the country and nation in

different historical periods. After the Ming and Qing dynasties, due to the reform of the imperial examination system, the influx of foreign thoughts, the disintegration of Small-scale peasant economy and other reasons, the gentry gradually lost its leading position in the grass-roots social management. At the same time, the people gradually changed from respect and trust to disgust and resistance. From the Qin and Han dynasties to the Ming and Qing dynasties, from *A New Account of the Tales of the World* to *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the image of the squire showed obvious differences in the novel, and the squire gradually changed from a prestigious manager to a "robber" who oppressed the people. Although they are the tools of plot development in the novel, but do not have the real social character, we can still smell the real historical flavor from the novel's description of the squire.

Since modern times, in order to pursue the goal of building a national democratic country, the behavior of "expelling evil gentry" has disappeared, and a positive and positive image of the country gentry has gradually appeared in literary works. But it has to be admitted that the elite culture constructed by the rule of the gentry for thousands of years and the ideology of Confucian culture are an important part of Chinese traditional culture. Due to social reasons, the image of the squire in Chinese classical literature may deviate from the historical facts to a certain extent, but the squire governance system implemented in the ancient society plays an important role in grass-roots management and enlightens the current society.

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