

A Comparative Study of the Innovation of Yan Mo's dramas

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ABSTRACT

This article is mainly to give a comprehensive study of Yan Mo's four independent dramas qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis and the mixed-methods approach in textual analysis, summarizing their differences and similarities, and displaying the innovation of the drama Crocodile which was published in June, 2023, which strengthens the philosophical discussion on the meaning of survival. Three questions are to be answered by writing this essay: 1) What are the innovations of Yan Mo's drama Crocodile compared with his three other independent dramas? 2) What are the inheritances of Yan Mo's drama Crocodile from his three other independent dramas? 3) What are the motivations for Yan Mo to have such a change?

KEYWORDS

Yan Mo; Drama; Crocodile; Innovation

1 Introduction

Yan Mo, China's first Nobel Prize winner in literature, has published 18 novels, 20 novellas, 138 short stories, 103 essays (Feng&Wang, 2024, p.50). As a drama writer, Yan Mo also showed extraordinary achievements. In 2023, he released the blockbuster Crocodile, fulfilling the vow he had made in 2019 in front of the statue of Shakespeare's former residence: "I will spend the rest of my life completing the transformation from novelist to playwright (Dai, 2023)."

Based on the classification criteria of Zhao Shaofan (2022), Mo Yan now has published 4 independent dramas which are respectively The Wife of a Boiler, Farewell my Concubine, Our Jing Ke, and Crocodile. These dramas of Mo Yan complement each other, having both inheritance and innovation. The drama Crocodile, a modern tragic fable of magical realism, develops around the birthday gift, a "crocodile" from the businessman Laohei on the protagonist Wudan Shan's 55th birthday.

The proper use of the image of a crocodile in the drama Crocodile highlights the long-neglected but real "desire", implying the profound theme that indulging the expansion of desire in our daily life can only lead people to a terrible dream and finally completing the inquiry into the philosophy of human nature, and then explores the deepest depths of the human spirit.

1.1 Research Background

In the new era, most countries in the world are trying to know and understand more about contemporary China. Literature is not only the most important part of the original culture of a country and a nation, but also an important carrier of national spirit and culture. The value of literature "making China go out" becomes more and more important nowadays.

1.2 Research Significance

Yan Mo's winning of the 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature is undoubtedly a major event for Chinese literary works to be published, and it is of more symbolic significance for Chinese literary works to become better appreciated throughout the world. It is also critical for us to carefully study the influential factors of Mo Yan's works in the world and sort out the path of his gradual widespread popularity, which has practical reference significance for China's other literary works to go the same way. Yan Mo's works are not only artistic expression, but also reflection and criticism of social reality. Through the charm of stage art, cross-cultural communication and innovative expression methods, Yan Mo's drama works can more vividly present Chinese stories to the audience, making an important contribution to enhancing the international community's understanding and recognition of China.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) What are the innovations of Yan Mo's drama Crocodile compared with his three other independent dramas?
- 2) What are the inheritances of Yan Mo's drama Crocodile from his three other independent dramas?
- 3) What are the motivations for Yan Mo to have such a change?

1.4 Research Methodology

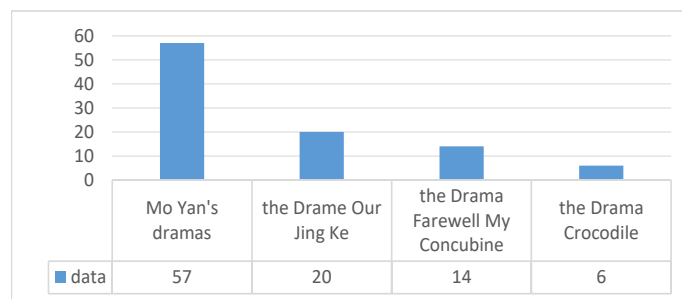
Textual Analysis (Assia Khan, 2023) is a research method that involves closely and critically examining written, spoken, or visual messages. It refers to the process of deconstructing text and its underlying themes, messages, and symbols - to understand the intentions, motivations, and perspectives of its creators. In literature, textual analysis allows critics to delve deep into the text in search of hidden meanings, themes, or symbols. It enables them to interpret the author's perspectives, historical contexts, or implicit messages conveyed through the text. This method of research is used in various academic disciplines, including cultural studies, literature, bilical studies, anthropology, sociology, and others (Chris Drew, 2023; Dearing, 2022; McKee, 2003;).

Textual analysis is the most important method in literary studies. Almost all work in this field involves in-depth analysis of texts – in this context, usually novels, poems, stories or plays. Textual analysis generally consists of four stages: descriptive stage, analytical stage, interpretative stage and evaluative stage. The three commonly used approaches are qualitative analysis, quantative analysis and the mixed-methods approach in textual analysis. Texts are usually analyzed from four parts as follows : content analysis, themantic analysis and so on.

2 Research Results

As of August 2024, among the tens of thousands of research papers on Yan Mo on CNKI, there are only 57 research papers related to Mo Yan 's dramas research and creation, including 20 studies solely on the theme of the drama Our Jing Ke, 14 studies on the theme of Farewell My Concubine, and 6 studies on the theme of Crocodile (Table 1).

Table 1 Yan Mo's four independent dramas



As in Table Two, on CNKI, there are 20 research results under the title "Our Jing Ke". According to Table Two, it can be seen that the most recently published article on CNKI is Yanbing Qiao 's "How do we understand Jing Ke today, How do we understand us?", which was published in China Art Daily in October 2021. In the last three years, however, there has been no independent researches on the drama "Our Jing Ke". Up to now, the earliest research about Yan Mo 's drama Our Jing Ke is Behind Hero, a review on Mo Yan 's Drama Our Jing Ke which was published by Zhongqin Zhao in the magazine Modern Chinese in July 2006. Hong Zou, from the School of Chinese language and Literature of Beijing Normal University, published an article titled Cross-border Writing, Mixing and matching styles after watching Yan Mo 's new drama Our Jing Ke, which had the largest number of downloads, reaching 828 times up to the beginning of this research. On October 4, 2011, Ling Tang published an article with the title Our Jing Ke, in What face appears? The in-depth interview "Our Jing Ke" has the highest citation rate, reaching 12 times and being downloaded 792 times. Probably the most influential article.

As in Table Three, There are 14 research results on the main topic of The drama Farewell My Concubine, among which 5

Table 2 Detailed Researches on the Drama Our Jing Ke



are about female consciousness, 4 published between 2000 and 2004, including the first study, that is, A New Explanation of Mo Yan's Influence on Farewell My Concubine which was published by Rui An in Music Weekly on December 8, 2000. Another article, published in 2015, explains the symphonic polyphonic meaning structure of Farewell My Concubine through the dialogue between Yu Ji and Lu Zhi, two women of spirits.

The latest publication is "Historical Plays Emerging from Modern Spiritual Symphony" published by Wang Yu in China Art Daily on December 8, 2023, emphasizing the spiritual influence of dramas on modern people. The master's thesis Research on Narrative Evolution of Farewell My Concubine written by Du Xiaojie from Jinan University in May, 2011 has been downloaded and cited the most, reaching 3,592 times and being cited 11 times. This thesis selects five typical texts as the analysis objects, namely, The Records of the Grand Historian, Xiang Yu's Original Records, The Legend of a Thousand Pieces, The Peking Opera Farewell My Concubine, the Novel Farewell My Concubine and the Drama Farewell My Concubine, discussing the causes of literary rewriting and narrative variation in the process of rewriting from the perspective of rewriting. Wang Wei was once a postgraduate of Henan University.

The download volume of Wang Wei's 2005 master thesis The Modern Evolution and Interpretation of Farewell My Concubine is only next to that of Du Xiaojie, which emphasizes that the drama Farewell My Concubine and its related plots constitute a very charming subject in the history of Chinese literature and have extraordinary cultural significance in classical literature. This master thesis of Wang Wei in 2005 was downloaded 2,299 times and cited 5 times. The influence is second only to Du Xiaojie's paper.

Table 3 Detailed Researches on the Drama Farewell My Concubine

Researches on the Drama Farewell My Concubine				
Category	Author	Article Title	Time	Magazine title
The latest study	Yu Wang	Historical Plays Emerging from Modern Spiritual Symphon	Dec.2023	China Art Daily
The earliest study	Rui An	A New Explanation of Mo Yan's Influence on Farewell My Concubine	Dec.2000	China Art Daily
Being most downloaded (3592times)	Xiajie Du	A Study on Narrative Evolution of Farewell My Concubine	Dec.2011	Drama Literature
Being cited the most (11 times)	Xiajie Du	A Study on Narrative Evolution of Farewell My Concubine	Dec. 2011	Drama Literature

On Chinese CNKI, when we enter the key word "the drama Crocodile", we can get 6 Research results because the drama Crocodile was only published on May, 2023 (as inTable Four). As far as the time span of Crocodile's publication and research volume are concerned, the drama Crocodile has Narrative -- Yan Mo's drama Crocodile published by Professor Wang Xueqian from the School of Language and Literature of Jilin University on the magazine Contention in Literature and Art on July 25, 2024.

The earliest study was This is the Familiar Yan Mo, but also the Innovative Mo Yan published by Xueqing Dai in Nanfang Daily on July 16, 2023. Yong Liu, a professor from the School of Chinese language and Literature of Beijing Normal University, published his article titled From Yu Cao's Thunderstorm to Yan Mo's Crocodile- Chinese Modern and Contemporary Writers' Fundamental Thoughts on Fate in the magazine Chinese Contemporary Literature Studies in July 2024. In less than a month after the article was published, it had been downloaded 1,640 times, which is a very rare phenomenon so far.

It can be concluded that Yan Mo's drama Crocodile has caused great attraction in the literary world. Professor Xinqiang Cong, who is from Shandong University, published an article named Yan Mo's Crocodile Narrative-On Yan Mo's drama Crocodile on the magazine Chinese Contemporary Literature Studies on September 18, 2023: On Yan Mo's new drama Crocodile and crocodilespirit was cited once. The remaining five articles are not cited.

Table 4 Details of Researches on the Drama Crocodile

Researches on the Drama Crocodile				
Category	Author	Article Name	Time	Magazine Title
The Latest Re- search	Xueqian Wang	Mo Yan's Crocodile narrative -- On Mo Yan's drama Crocodile	July, 2024	Contention in Literature and Art
The Earliest Re- search	Xueqing Dai	This is the Familiar Mo Yan, but also the Innovative Mo Yan	Dec. 2000	Nanfang Daily
Being down- loaded the most (1640times)	Yong Liu	From Cao Yu's Thunderstorm to Mo Yan's Crocodile- Chinese Modern and Con- temporary Writers' Fundamental Thoughts on Fate	July, 2024	Studies of Contempo- rary Chinese Literature
Being cited the most (1times)	Xinqiang Cong	Mo Yan's Crocodile Narrative-On Mo Yan's drama Crocodile	Sep. 2023	Studies of Contempo- rary Chinese Literature

3 Discussions

3.1 The Commonness of Mo Yan's Dramas

The three dramas all involve the discussion of human nature, whether it is the desire and ambition in the drama *Crocodile*, or the historical characters and stories in the drama *Our Jing Ke* and the drama *Farewell My Concubine*, they all reflect the complexity and multi-faceted nature of human nature to varying degrees. Mo Yan's dramas always pay attention to human nature, focusing on the deep excavation and presentation of human nature. Through the profound analysis and description of the characters' words and deeds, characters' personality, psychology, fate and other aspects, it reveals the complex and multiple aspects of human nature, including goodness and beauty, selfishness and ugliness. This insistence on profound insight into human nature is the constant core of Mo Yan's drama works. Many of Mo Yan's dramas are based on history, borrowing a dramatic core from real stories, giving the characters in the drama some modern thoughts, using sharp dialogue and subversive stories to dig out the truth of human nature, thus triggering the audience and readers to think deeply, so that "all history is contemporary history; All historical plays should be contemporary plays." "Our Jing Ke" is the most true portrayal.

3.2 Crocodile as a Symbol of Expression of Human Desire

The purpose of naming the drama *Crocodile* is to use a crocodile to symbolize the expansion of human desire and the alienation of human nature. "In the drama *Crocodile*, the poetic nature of Mo Yan's drama has reached a new level. On the surface, this work deals with anti-corruption themes and the image of corrupt officials, but in fact, it examines human nature and questions fate through the special image of a 'crocodile'. 'Crocodile' which is rooted in reality and deep in meaning, can be a kind of people, a description of life situation, can also be called a poem that can make people have many imaginations and associations. So the drama *Crocodile* deconstruct the style of drama and transcend it (Liu and Li, 2024)." Mo Yan himself also admitted that "the ultimate purpose of drama is to write people, explore people's spiritual world, inner contradictions, and finally understand people, as is the same of novel (Mo, 2019)." The growth laws of crocodiles and human desires are similar, the biggest feature of crocodiles is that they can grow to how big the fish tank is, and they will differentiate males and females according to temperature. Mo Yan truly reflects the relationship between man and the environment: "man's desire is like a crocodile, once there is space and the right temperature, it will expand indefinitely until it swallows and destroys people (Mo, 2023)". In Mo Yan's drama, the crocodile is actually the real master on the stage. Everyone in the drama has a crocodile in his heart, and every reader and audience outside the drama does not have a crocodile in their heart? The unique feature of the image of "crocodile" is that it skillfully integrates the magicalism and reality, and deepens the symbolic meaning of the play by combining the imaginary and the real, which shows Mo Yan's continuous breakthrough and continuous innovation in literary creation.

3.3 Having a Different Spatial Narrative

The whole drama *Crocodile* largely displays three kinds of spatial types: geographical space, emotional space and psychological space. Compared with *Crocodile*, Mo Yan's historical drama combines more traditional Chinese opera and the characteristics of Zhanghui novels. *Farewell to My Concubine* and *Our Jing Ke* tell the story of the drama in the way of scattered perspective. In the long drama *Crocodile*, although the story spans a decade, it is specific to the protagonist's three birthdays, namely May 5, 2005, May 5, 2008 and May 5, 2015. When Mo Yan's archetypal experience of his hometown and folklore was exhausted, he turned his eyes to contemporary life and created the modern drama *Crocodile* by combining his 10-year life experiences at Procuratorial Daily. From the narrative of novel to drama, Mo Yan's dramatic creation characteristics have undergone some changes, which are well embodied in the new drama *Crocodile* and are pretty worth our thinking and learning. In the drama *Crocodile*, Wudan Shan's love and affection constitute his main emotional dimension and living space. The lack of the two not only exposes the alienation of his human nature and the ugliness of his soul, getting to the degree of having no chance to regain love and affection. The drama *Crocodile* not only depicts the survival dilemma of Wudan Shan from the perspective of external space, but also digs into his spiritual situation where he lives like a walking dead from the perspective of internal space. Wudan Shan knows nothing about language and doesn't have the power when he was the mayor, which makes him become less important to the people around him and suffers from the indifference from his Secretary Mufei Liu and the betray from his lover Xiuhua Ma. All this tear the character Wudan Shan open to all the readers and audiences, making the drama not only full of humanistic spirit, but also filled with an allegorical style and realistic character to warn the world.

3.4 Displaying Different Values

Mo Yan's *Crocodile* breaks through its realistic content, transcending the fate of individual characters and letting

readers see the fate of more people. The value of the drama *Crocodile* lies in that Mo Yan is not limited by his writing style, making use of a form that seems to be both a drama and the subject of anti-corruption to express the universal desire and limitation of human nature, which also highlights the universal appearance of Yan Mo's literary creation. Mo Yan constructs the classic of drama by the drama *Crocodile*, which not only enriches the form of drama, but also deepens the connotation of drama conflict. The core of *Crocodile* fundamentally expresses the exploration and questioning of fate. The fate writing of *Crocodile* is full of sense of reality, and the exploration and questioning of fate originating from reality and comes from the characters. As Yan Mo had said in the Epilogue, he has long been concerned about the history and social reality of anti-corruption on the land of China, and finds that people's degeneration and deterioration should be found from the source of human nature. He believes that this is fundamentally due to the loss of control of inner desire, so he hopes to create typical characters in the drama that deeply reveal human nature and touch the soul of readers. Based on this purpose, Mo Yan chose the image of crocodile. It is interesting to write that if you look into the crocodile's eyes and look into its eyes, you will enter a noble realm of forgetting all your troubles.

4 Conclusion

Like his novels, Yan Mo's dramas usually give readers and audiences a display of human nature, Chinese life and unique cultural customs, so his works transcend the limitations of regions, races and ethnic groups, becoming part of the world literature. Through the study of Mo Yan's drama, especially his drama *Crocodile*, we can better grasp the pulse and trend of Yan Mo's contemporary literary creation, which provides more powerful support and guidance for literary creation. Under the background of telling Chinese stories well in contemporary China, the study on Yan Mo's drama and its innovation has more far-reaching significance. This is not only reflected in the evolution of his personal literary creation, but also has an important impact on Chinese literature and even world literature.

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