

# Lao She's Beijing-style Language Reflects the Changes of the Times and the Feelings of the Family and Country

-- Take, For Example, The Image of a Citizen in "The Teahouse"

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**Abstract.** Lao She is a famous novelist in modern China and has the reputation of "People's Artist". His play "Teahouse" is considered by Cao Yu to be "a treasure in the history of Chinese drama". In "Teahouse", Lao She portrays a series of citizens represented by Wang Lifa, who grew up in Beijing and have a rich "Beijing flavor" in their language. Lao She is also using these original "Beijing flavor" language, through the mouth of these citizen images, to show the changes of modern China and Lao She's strong feelings for his family and country.

**Keywords:** Lao She; Old-fashioned Citizens; Beijing Language; Changing Times; Family and Country Feelings.

## 1. Introduction

Lao She is a well-known modern writer in China and enjoys the reputation of "People's Artist". Lao She was born in the lower class of Beijing, is a typical representative of Beijingers, and his long-term experience in the market has made him have a clear and profound understanding of Beijing's citizen class, and at the same time, the experience of overseas cultural exchanges has given him an extraterritorial perspective, allowing him to look at this part of Beijing's citizens from an extraterritorial perspective. Lao She's literary works are mostly based on daily life, and the civilians in his works are the reflection of the times, and the author reflects the personal image of the times by describing the attitudes of these characters towards traditional culture and new culture, and implies the author's feelings for his family and country in the depiction of the characters. Lao She's literary works are based on daily life, and "Teahouse" is Lao She's theatrical masterpiece, showing the story of the Wuxu Reform, the warlord melee and the story that took place in a teahouse called Yutai in the three eras of Wuxu Reform, warlord melee and the eve of the founding of New China for nearly half a century. The play depicts a group of old-fashioned citizens represented by Wang Lifa, depicts a large number of social customs, and shows a picture of the customs of Beijing life. The lines in the play are full of "Beijing flavor", and this article attempts to further understand how Lao She uses distinctive language to show the changes of the times and his feelings for his family and country through the analysis of these languages.

## 2. The Characteristics of the Image of the Citizens in "Teahouse".

In many of his works, Lao She uses the middle- and lower-class civil society in Beijing that he is familiar with as the object of expression, and constructs a vast "citizen world" for people. According to the formulation of "Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature", the citizen world of Lao She's novels can be specifically divided into three types, namely, old-school citizens, new-school citizens and decent citizens. [1]

### 2.1. Selfish and Conservative, Obedient Old-fashioned Citizens

The image of the old-school citizen, that is, the image of the citizen who still retains the traditional Chinese cultural morality, kindness, meekness and other traditional virtues in Lao She's works, but also has the shortcomings of selfishness, conservatism, and obedience. As the embodiment of the



negative and backward aspects of the old Chinese traditional culture, they represent Lao She's criticism of the negative aspects of traditional Chinese culture.

As an old-fashioned citizen, Wang Lifa is well versed in the civic philosophy of "everyone sweeps the snow in front of the door, and does not care about the frost on the tiles of others", so sometimes he turns a blind eye to the "things that should not be taken care of" that happens in the teahouse. In "Teahouse", the traffickers lured Kang Shunzi's father and daughter to the teahouse, Wang Lifa knew that Kang Shunzi's father and daughter were in danger, but he didn't stop it, but for the sake of the teahouse's business, regardless of whether he asked. This reflects Wang Lifa's indifference. In the second act of "Teahouse", in the face of the unjustified assignment of the patrol police, he did not resist at all, and in the third act, in the face of the extortion of the "Three Emperors Road" and the requisition of the teahouse by the Kuomintang reactionaries, Wang Lifa could not resist, and finally ended up hanging himself, which reflects the weakness of the old citizen's character of being obedient.

Lao She's depiction of the complex image of these old-fashioned citizens is also to reflect the complex social situation at that time, the country is in internal and external troubles, the old and new cultures in the society are constantly impacting each other, the common people live in poverty, in order to survive, the poor class has to be indifferent and selfish, but in the face of the evil forces in society, the character defects of the traditional old citizens make them only able to accept it. Lao She looks at the traditional society from the perspective of old-school citizens, showing his unique feelings for his family and country.

## **2.2. Open-Minded New-school Citizens**

The new school of citizens, that is, who grew up in the traditional feudal old China, but were influenced by Western ideas and culture, pursued a Western-style lifestyle, and tried to use modern consciousness to transform the image of citizens who lived a traditional life.

This kind of citizens are represented by Qin Zhongyi, who actively accepts the advanced ideas of the West, and tries to save the toiling people by copying Western ideas, such as Qin Zhongyi in "Teahouse", who sold all his belongings to open a factory and do business, but due to the restrictions of the times at that time, his goal of saving the country was not realized, and even after he worked hard for more than 40 years, it was seized and confiscated, and Qin Zhongyi has completely sunk since then. Qin Zhongyi was also the epitome of some national entrepreneurs in China at that time, he used all his wealth to do something good for the country and the nation, but no one understood, and at the same time was suppressed by the "three mountains", and finally ended in tragedy.

As a multi-faceted character, Qin Zhongyi also has his character flaws, as an upper-middle class who accepts the new school culture, he despises traditional culture, dislikes the low-level citizens, and has a self-righteous style. For example, when he met beggars in the teahouse and shouted at them, "Get out!" without regard for the feelings of others, showing the high-minded and cruel indifference of some of the new citizens. Lao She also used these new-school characters to criticize these characters at that time. He believes that these new figures will not bring a better future to China, and the act of discarding traditional culture will ultimately fail.

## **2.3. Decent Citizens with Upright Rules**

Decent citizens refer to those citizens who live in the bottom society, but are kind-hearted, upright, full of patriotic enthusiasm, and conform to the many ideal qualities in Lao She's heart. This kind of citizen is represented by Chang Siye. Chang Siye had a fiery patriotic heart, for example, when he saw the dark and corrupt situation in the last years of the Qing Dynasty and knew that the country was unsustainable, he angrily joined the Boxer Rebellion, wanting to save the country and the people with his own strength. At the same time, Chang Siye did not despise those Han people around him because of his identity as a banner man, he deeply believed in the importance of self-reliance, and after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, he lost his special identity and tried to make money by his own strength and make a living by growing vegetables. In the new-school citizens represented by Chang

Siye, Lao She has high hopes for them, believing that they are the hope of China in the future, but the weight of the times and the shortcomings of these citizens themselves who have no scientific theory guidance and blindly fight alone make them eventually fail and perish.

The shaping of the image of the citizen has an important value in Lao She's works, Lao She excavates the negative and backward aspects of China's national character through the depiction of the image of the old-school citizen, the new citizen and the decent citizen, and shows a deep understanding of the national character, which does not come from the corruption of morality, but from the deep cognition of the backwardness of the whole society. It is through the depiction of these characters that Lao She expresses his hope for healing the national spirit and shows his patriotic feelings.

### **3. The performance of Beijing-style language in "Teahouse".**

#### **3.1. Extensive Use of Children's Words**

Childization is a unique phenomenon in Beijing dialect, which adds the word "er" to the end of the word to give the vocabulary a more intimate and vivid charm. In "Teahouse", Lao She skillfully uses children's words, which not only increases the rhythmic beauty of the language, but also makes the dialogue of the characters closer to life and full of local color. For example, when describing the language of the guests in the teahouse, Lao She used children's words such as "grandfather" and "buddy", which immediately made people feel the enthusiasm and boldness of the old Beijingers. In addition, Lao She also portrays the character and identity of the characters through children's words. Characters from different social classes use the term differently, and this difference reflects their lifestyle, educational background, and social status. For example, figures at the bottom of the society such as Tang Tiezui and Liu Mazi use more childized words, such as Liu Mazi's "You two are really in the morning!" [2] and Tang Tiezui's "I'll always give you back when I catch up with Ming'er!" These children's words are full of life, showing their simplicity and straightforwardness, while more cultured characters, such as Qin Zhongyi, use less childized words to reflect his elegance and upbringing. For example, Qin Zhongyi's "Only by doing so can the country become rich and strong!" and "I will say hello to you another day, goodbye!" The lack of childish words in Qin Zhongyi's words shows Qin Zhongyi's disdain for the company of civilians and his self-esteem.

#### **3.2. The Use of Colloquial Vocabulary in Beijing**

Lao She uses a large number of Beijing dialect words in "Teahouse", which makes the whole work full of Beijing flavor and vividly shows the regional culture and language characteristics of old Beijing. He skillfully incorporated the unique vocabulary and expressions of the Beijing dialect, such as "dehao", "nongti", "see", etc., which have a strong Beijing dialect style, making the dialogue closer to the daily life of the old Beijingers, as if you can hear the familiar Beijing accent. In addition, Lao She also used some specific titles and slang from the Beijing dialect. For example, "grandfathers" is used to address male friends or acquaintances, reflecting the intimacy and friendliness of old Beijingers, "please be safe" refers to greeting superiors or elders to show respect and respect, and "chewing grain" refers to daily living expenses. These words not only enrich the language of the work, but also give the characters a more distinct local color and personality. For example, Wang Lifa's "Buddies, they are all friends on the street, and they have something to say." ", Huang Fatzhi's "I'm please!", and Kang Shunzi's "I'll go, so that you can save some chewing grain!", the use of these colloquial words greatly enhances the "Beijing" color of the language of the drama "Teahouse".

#### **3.3. The Rhetoric of Words in the Beijing Dialect**

Lao She not only uses the vocabulary of the Beijing dialect in "Teahouse", but also skillfully adopts the rhetorical methods of the Beijing dialect, so that the language of the whole work is full of strong Beijing flavor. He made extensive use of rhetorical devices such as irony, exaggeration, and puns in the Beijing dialect, which not only enhanced the vividness of the language, but also reflected the unique language habits and aesthetic tastes of the old Beijingers. The rhetoric of irony occupies a

huge proportion in "The Teahouse", and Lao She's unique sense of humor is deeply reflected in it, for example, in the third act, Wang Lifa says to the tea customer, "The tea money is paid first", but the tea customer says, "I am poor, it is more convenient not to drink!" Lao She uses the theme of tea money to express his mockery of the old society at that time. "Teahouse" is also often used in exaggerated techniques, exaggeration is to stimulate the reader's imagination, using exaggerated ways to describe things, for example, in the first act, Liu Mazi said: "(Mr. Pang) is waiting for the Queen Mother, very red, even the vinegar bottle at home is agate." Liu Mazi's image of flattering others jumped on the paper. The pun rhetoric is most evident in The Teahouse. Lao She skillfully uses the pun meaning of words to make the language more humorous and witty. The use of this rhetorical device not only adds interest to the work, but also shows the wit and humor of the old Beijingers. For example: "Improve and improve, the more you change, the cooler it gets!" In addition to the above rhetorical devices, Lao She also pays attention to the use of modal words and particles in the Beijing dialect to enhance the prosodic sense and colloquial characteristics of the language. He skillfully simulates the intonation and tone of old Beijingers, making the work closer to real life and more intimate to read.

#### **4. The Spatio-Temporal Changes of the Beijing-Style Language Presented by the Citizens in "Teahouse".**

##### **4.1. Narration of Historical Events**

"Teahouse" takes a small teahouse in Beijing as a microcosm of the whole city, and depicts the living conditions of Wang Lifa, Qin Zhongyi, Tang Tiezui and other characters in three periods of modern Chinese history, in order to reflect the social and psychological changes of the old citizens in the old society. This work concentrates on reflecting China's traditional civic culture, reflecting on and criticizing its backwardness. Reflecting the daily lives of old Beijing citizens from different social backgrounds, the drama focuses on three periods in China's modern history, namely the period of the Wuxu Reform, the period of warlord melee and the period of victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. On the contrary, it expounds these major historical events from a new perspective from the perspective of what the characters in the drama see and think, and expresses the choices and lives of various people in society under the real historical background through the behavior, language and final fate of different characters, and places people in a specific historical environment of the changing times to observe, showing the impact of the changing times on the old citizens and thinking about the thoughts and concepts of the old Chinese citizens. Taking the real events that happened in modern history as the implicit background of the drama "Teahouse" makes this drama more characteristic of social and civilian history, rendering a thick atmosphere, showing the literariness of the literary genre of drama, while expressing the impact of the changes of the times on the citizens at the bottom of the society more realistically, and more able to stimulate readers' in-depth thinking.

##### **4.2. Changes in Time Consciousness**

In the play "Teahouse", the main character Wang Lifa's change in the content of the teahouse shows the change in his sense of time, and the teahouse in the first act sells not only tea, but also dim sum and vegetable rice, with notes pasted everywhere that say "Don't talk about state affairs". At this time, Wang Lifa had just taken over the teahouse from his father, and because the time was still the last year of the Qing Dynasty, the teahouse still retained a large number of relics of the old era. In the second act, Wang Lifa is about to improve the teahouse because he has entered a new era, he changes the layout of the teahouse to make it more suitable for the needs of "civilized people", and in order to meet the needs of student accommodation, he changes the back of the teahouse into an apartment. At the same time, in order to keep up with the times, he learned English, and when chatting with Li San, a "yes" often appeared in his mouth. In order to adapt to the changes of the times, dim sum and vegetables are no longer sold, the storefront in the back has also been changed into an apartment, the

tea house has been changed from the previous long table and bench to a small table and rattan chairs, the large painting of "Drunken Eight Immortals" and the shrine of the God of Wealth on the wall have been changed to foreign cigarette advertisements, and the note "Don't talk about state affairs" has become larger. In the third act, after experiencing the devastation of the Japanese invaders, the teahouse after the victory of the Anti-Japanese War is not as decent as before, the rattan chair has disappeared and has been replaced by a small stool and a stool, there are more notes of "Don't talk about state affairs", the words are also bigger, and there are more notes next to it that "pay for tea first". In addition, because of the devastation of the Japanese occupation period and the Kuomintang's ingenious seizure, the rattan chairs in the teahouse can only be replaced by small stools and stools, and the furniture is also dull, a scene of everything withering, just as Wang Lifa himself said, "I have always loved to improve all my life, and I am anxious to see that the business is so bad!" wants to reverse this decline by looking for a hostess. In the depiction of the teahouse and the citizens in three acts, Lao She's description of the protagonist Wang Lifa's time consciousness in "The Teahouse" shows his development of the form of thinking in the changing times, from which the development of national consciousness is shown in a small way, and the theme of the novel is deepened.

### **4.3. Reversal of the Concept of Space**

In the first act of "Teahouse", Wang Lifa's understanding of the teahouse is only to take over his father's class and open this teahouse, at this time his spatial consciousness is still limited to his "Yutai" teahouse, he does not care much about everything around him, and his vision is still relatively narrow. At the beginning of the second act, due to the change and progress of society, his concept of space expanded from his own teahouse to other teahouses in Beijing, and when he saw that other teahouses were closed, he took the lead in renovating his teahouse to make it more in line with the needs of the new society. In the third act, after experiencing the brutal plunder of the Japanese occupation period and the rule of the Kuomintang, the teahouse withered, after all this, Wang Lifa's inner concept of space began to be further improved, he began to care about politics, concerned about the People's Liberation Army guerrillas in Xishan outside Beijing, disgusted with the Kuomintang lackeys such as Pang Si Grandpa and Xiao Erdezi who came to the teahouse. In the process of reversing the concept of space, Lao She's understanding of the importance of developing people's wisdom is reflected, and his thinking on national nature is displayed, which contains strong feelings for the family and country.

## **5. Fourth, The Concept of Home and Country Presented by the Beijing Language of the Citizens in "Teahouse"**

### **5.1. The National Consciousness of Home-Country Isomorphism**

Yang Yingwei believes that as a civilian writer, Lao She renders the pain and hope of the poor class in his works, and through these ordinary people at the bottom, he expounds his sense of distress and the concept of family and country, and he constantly thinks deeply about the future of the country and the current situation of culture. It is precisely because Lao She has such a feeling of family and country that it will affect the works he creates, and "Teahouse" is the full embodiment of his creative thoughts, as Lao She said in "Answering Several Questions about the > of < Teahouse", he concentrated some small people in society in this teahouse where three religions and nine streams gathered, and used their conversations to reflect some political information on the side to reflect the political problems of society [3]. Many of the characters in "Teahouse" embody Lao She's national consciousness of home-country isomorphism. For example, Qin Zhongyi, he sold his property to open an industry, and built a factory not for his own promotion and wealth, but for the sake of industry to save the country, so that the people can live a better life, he is a doer who seeks innovation and patriotism, which is related to Lao She's British life experience, and this character contains Lao She's beautiful imagination for the future of the country.

Wang Lifa is another vivid example, in the drama "Teahouse", Lao She describes him as a typical character of the old-school citizen, he has complex emotions of both criticism and appreciation for this kind of character, on the one hand, Wang Lifa is a representative of the old Chinese citizen, blindly optimistic, submissive, and finally died tragically and in a nest, on the other hand, he has a little bit of the characteristics of a new citizen, he is good at learning new knowledge, and actively reforming, but the flaws in his character still do not let him see the dawn of the new era. He has both a progressive and a conservative side. Through the portrayal of this character, Lao She shows the typical characters of old-fashioned citizens in society, and expresses his concern for the future and destiny of this type of character and even the whole country through the fate of Wang Lifa, which shows the national consciousness of his family and country.

## 5.2. A Sense of Social Responsibility that Keeps Pace with the Times

Lao She's sense of social responsibility is not limited to the present, and his sense of social responsibility has different meanings in different periods. This is also reflected in his "Teahouse", for example, Wang Lifa mentioned at the beginning, at the beginning, Wang Lifa in the first act, he just wanted to maintain the basic needs of his teahouse, so he would become sleek and exquisite, he just wanted to carefully abide by his philosophy of life, hoping to maintain his livelihood in the teahouse. But in the second act, in the face of repeated wars and political oppression, Wang Lifa was a little powerless, the same character, in different periods, his feelings for his family and country were generated from scratch with the changes in the social environment. Wang Lifa was not patriotic at first, he just wanted to maintain his business. But later in the second act, after accepting this external interference, he began to stop following the creed of not talking about state affairs, and openly discussed state affairs, paying attention to the changes of the times. In the third act, the teahouse is bleak and the business is not good. Wang Lifa finally chose to hang himself in a teahouse in the face of the plunder of the Kuomintang spies, which was also a kind of rebellion against the authoritarian regime. This also reflects the starting point of the Chinese people's opposition to the authoritarian regime, represented by Wang Lifa, although this starting point is very low, but they hope to give themselves a better life through their own resistance. This is also the epitome of Lao She's continuous development of his sense of social responsibility after experiencing the changes of the times.

## 6. Epilogue

This paper mentions the three types of characters in "Teahouse", namely old-school citizens, new-school citizens and decent citizens, and reflects their lives in the changing times from the Beijing-style language of these characters, and reflects the national consciousness and family and country feelings contained in Lao She's heart through the changes in their lifestyles and their final life destiny. Through the understanding of Lao She's "Teahouse" and the careful appreciation of these Beijing-style languages in the work, readers can more deeply understand the rich ideological connotation of Lao She's works and feel the excellence of Lao She's works.

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