

# A comparative study on the construction of the dualistic system of human and beast in Oe Kenzaburo and Lu Xun's literary works

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the construction of animal intentionality in Oe Kenzaburo and Lu Xun's literary works to analyze the background and construction methods of the duality system between human and animal. Then make a comparative analysis of the literary enlightenment thought, explore the mutual relationship between the two in the creation career, and then analyze the profound influence on the literary exchange between China and Japan.

**Key words:** construction technique; Literary enlightenment; Dualistic system

## 1. The literary origin of Kenzaburo Oe and Lu Xun

Kenzaburo Oe began reading Lu Xun's works at the age of 12 and has not stopped reading for decades. "The words of hope in Lu Xun's novels, which I first read when I was 12, have lived on in my body for nearly 60 years and have shown significance throughout my life," he said. There is no denying that Oe has been exposed to the works of other writers in modern Chinese literature, but he has a special fondness for Lu Xun. He expressed great respect for Lu Xun's hard spirit and critical spirit in Lu Xun's literature, and even after winning the Nobel Prize for Literature, he said humbly, "One of the giants in world literature who can never be forgotten is Lu Xun. In my lifetime, I hope to get closer to Mr. Lu Xun, even if it is only one step closer." He also mentioned Lu Xun many times in his lectures. It is this indissoluble bond with Lu Xun that makes Oe Kenzaburo's literary creation inextricably linked with Lu Xun's literary creation.

There are not only few research articles on the relationship between Kenzaburo Oe and Lu Xun, but also the perspective of the research is too concentrated, mainly on the spirit of resistance between Kenzaburo Oe and Lu Xun. Even in this regard, there are only a few articles, the discussion of the problem can only be an overview, naturally not comprehensive, in-depth, thorough.

In the literary creation of the two, it is undeniable that there are two opposing worlds, that is, there is a "beast world" corresponding to the "human world" objectively. Horsford points out that when the two focus on the relationship between "man and animal" in their novels, they respectively give the animals "sheep, dog and Wolf" rich metaphors from the perspective of human life evolution, highlighting their unique aesthetic thoughts. However, there is no discussion from the creative techniques and skills, and then the comparative research results focusing on the construction of the antagonism between humans and animals can be described as a blank, which has great research value and significance.

## 2. The embodiment of animal intention in literary works

There are about 200 animals involved in Lu Xun's works, most of which exist as literary images. Among them, 20 important ones were created by Lu Xun, mainly wolves, snakes, owls, crows, cows, elephants, dogs, cats, sheep, flies, birds, and lumbar bees. They vary in cultural content and aesthetic value, and can be found scattered in Lu Xun's works of different styles in different periods. Animal images, including novels, essays, letters, etc. It can be divided into several categories: first, ferocious animals: tiger, Wolf, lion, Haiyina, snake; Second, birds: eagles, crows, owls; Third, domestic animals: cattle, sheep, geese, dogs, cats, chicken, ducks, etc.; Four are insects: mosquitoes, flies, bees, tadpoles, ants, etc.; In Lu Xun's novels, animal images are presented as "groups" or group images, most of which focus on thinking about the problems of modern Chinese intellectuals.

In general, it is hard to say that Lu Xun intended to build up a complete animal image system. But it is undeniable that in Lu Xun's works, corresponding to the "human world", there is indeed an objective "animal world". Like the creation of characters, Lu Xun also "tried to explore people's souls" through the creation of animal images. Influenced by Lu Xun's creation, Kenzaburo Oe used a large number of animal images to construct texts in his literary creation, especially in his early creations. Among them, dogs, wolves, sheep and birds became "frequent visitors" in his works, forming an original binary opposition system.

All animal images, while forming a mirror relationship with human beings, also build a pattern of opposites with human beings. According to their correlation, they can be divided into four types as shown in the following chart.

- (1) Domesticated domestic animals: cattle, sheep, rabbit, chicken, cat, horse and camel
- (2) Wild and unmolted animals: wild dogs/hunting dogs, wolves, eagles/vultures, monkeys
- (3) Birds deprived of liberty: birds, doves
- (4) Small animals that are abused and killed: worms and mice

It is characteristic of Oe to mention and explain his own works in every one of his works. His early works are no exception. In the epilogue to the one-volume "Luxury of the Dead," Oe says, "Thinking about the state of being imprisoned, of living within closed walls, is a consistent theme for me." Such remarks have also influenced the interpretation of his early works to date. The sense of "nothingness and futility" and "isolation" of the youth during the occupation period is the common living condition of the people depicted by Oe through

animal imagery.

In the epilogue of his novel collection *The Luxury of the Dead*, “Thinking about the state of being imprisoned and living in a closed wall” fits neatly with what he calls “my consistent theme.” In the world of peace and stability, this is a “wonderful” abnormal landscape, but in concept, this is exactly a “state of imprisonment”, and the rich image of this state is the original significance of the debut of the Great River literature.

Oe writes in a note to his work: “We Japanese young people are locked up in walls of ambiguity and obstinateness, with no real human bond between us, like dogs pushing each other with their rough coats and howling. Just the impression of wiggling our bodies at each other. Moreover, due to the ambiguity and closure, the judgment and analytical power of realism gradually decline, and eventually lose their sustained energy, becoming abnormal and illogical. The destination of young spirit is more or less related to the background of *The Times*.” The birth of Dajiang literature cannot be separated from animal issues. So far, the leading achievements have focused on the metaphorical functions of animal images. It seems that the failure to grasp the organic correlation between the image of “animal” and the living state of the people has not touched the intention of literary enlightenment in Oe’s works. The work traces the social status quo trapped by the nothingness in an all-round way, and analyzes the indifference and helplessness of human beings who have lost their instinctive will and are forced into the “animal” environment.

It can be seen that the richness of animal intention in Da Jiang’s literary works is exactly the same as that of Lu Xun’s literary works, and both of them are deeply influenced by the theory of evolution. It is not simply regarded as a historical view, but pays more attention to its scientific and rationalistic value content. The “natural selection” and “survival of the fittest” contained in it will become an absolute natural and historical criterion.

Both Lu Xun and Da Jiang deeply felt the difficult living conditions of ordinary people, and showed full sympathy and humanistic care. In the relationship between fate and will, out of the vigilance of the sense of survival crisis and the unique feelings of the writers concerned about the country and the people, both of them tried to arouse the will of the people, in order to break through the firm “wall” and obtain the right to live freely.

It can be seen that, due to the influence of various factors, the human-animal dualistic system constructed by the two literary giants has a close relationship, but it also shows completely different literary atmosphere.

### 3. The comparison of construction techniques

The animal images created by Lu Xun under the cultural aesthetic observation are obviously divided into two opposite categories: one is positive, mainly including wolves, snakes, owls, crows, cows, elephants and other animals; The other is whether qualitative, mainly dogs, cats, flies, mosquitoes, lumbar bees and other animals. Among them, Lu Xun liked wolves, snakes and owls the most, and hated dogs and cats the most. Comparing the two, it is not difficult to find that the former is the animalistic and wild, while the latter is the tamed and animalistic. Here, we can also see that Lu Xun is negative to the “humanized” animals, he affirmed is still the natural nature of animals, is the beast. This is consistent with his repeated appreciation and call for “wild” in the article. And the so-called beast, wild, as a human character, refers to such a strong, will, such as “fight for heaven and refuse to vulgar”. As we know, this is the basic character that Lu Xun endowed to the spiritual warriors in his mind, and in fact, it is also the modern new personality that his ideal Chinese people should possess. He not only loved intellectuals so much, but also looked to the public so much. More often than not, he regarded the ideal intellectuals as the embodiment of this new personality. Some of the shadow of Nietzsche’s “Superman” is the embodiment, representative, strength and will of his ideal Chinese model personality. This kind of character embodied in the spiritual warriors is also a good medicine to cure the national draft disease in Lu Xun’s eyes, and is the fundamental foundation of “establishing people” and eventually establishing the “country of man”.

Lu Xun’s creative methods are basically in accordance with the principle of realism to refine life, reflect life. Among them, Lu Xun borrowed some means of expression of symbolism, so that the creation of his novels on a solid realistic foundation. It shows profound richness and multi-layered cultural implication with its ideality and symbolism. The animal intention constructed by Oe Kenzaburo is different from Lu Xun’s “clear distinction between good and evil”, which basically has obvious negative characteristics. The “beasts” with obvious advantages in power play the role of the powerful, inflicting violence and humiliation on the weak. The “livestock” and “small animals” in the weak position are powerless in the face of power, endure humiliation and bear heavy burdens, and behave in a pitiful and pathetic manner. In order to portray the living conditions of the people in the context of *The Times* to the extreme, Oe makes full use of the philosophical theory of space thought proposed by Benjamin, and sets the scenes of his early works in either closed or semi-closed Spaces, such as buses, police stations, basements, warehouses, and correctional institutions. At the same time, combined with the ideological core of Sartre’s existentialism, the state of “nothingness” and “isolation” is vividly demonstrated.

If Kenzaburo Oe’s literature at that time was characterized by objectivization of people’s despair psychology and sublimation through Sartre’s “wall” thought, then I would like to call it “futile lyricism” (“ Interpretation “in Kenzaburo Oe’s Complete Works I”) according to Hirano Ken, who understood Oe’s literary thought very well from the beginning. To understand Kenzaburo Oe’s literature, especially the awareness of “walls” in his early literary works, it is similar to Lu Xun’s “Iron House” mentioned in the preface to *The Scream*. Just like many young people, Kenzaburo Oe did not choose to “redeem” his soul and change the whole era by throwing himself into the practice of Japanese realistic politics. Kenzaburo Oe has been stubbornly pursuing his own literary path and trying to overcome the crisis of *The Times*

during the period of social transformation in Japan.

In the literary works of Lu Xun and Oe, man and beast are entangled together, forming a system of animal images in contrast with the background of The Times, which not only deeply exposes the cruelty of the jungle in the human society and the animal world, but also symbolizes the infinite energy of the will to power. Hidden behind it is a “human world”, which reflects the literary masters’ understanding and thinking of human beings. As the spiritual fighters of literary enlightenment, they both pay close attention to human’s ideological consciousness and spiritual personality.

### **Epilogue:**

Through the analysis and comparison and the exploration of the internal reasons, it is not difficult to find that Lu Xun advocates the transformation of oneself first to achieve the transformation of society, and Oe Kenzaburo intends to achieve the spiritual pursuit of the overall salvation of mankind through individual self-help, both advocate the individual to strive to achieve the overall change. The cultural criticism and enlightenment in Oe’s literature are exactly the same as Lu Xun’s idea of “establishing people”. In addition, the choice of different literary genres and the use of different artistic expression techniques make the literary creation of Lu Xun and OE Kenzaburo show different styles. The longitudinal analogy study of the literary works of the two literary giants needs to be further investigated.

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