

Reflecting in Ten Words: What changes have been made after the cultural revolution?

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Book Review: Reflecting in Ten Words

Currently, China is in a rapid development in many aspects. However, there are many issues left after the cultural revolution and Chinese economic reform. I read *China in Ten Words*, written by Yu Hua, this term. I was shocked because he discussed many facts which are forbidden now, but they indeed exist. In this book, he draws the connections between the modern society, the revolution of in the post-Mao era and the cultural revolution. Due to the radical and one-sided development, there are many short stories in this book which reveals the big gaps between the upper class and the lower class. These gaps make up the conflicts and the pains of China. Only when we feel other's pain are we able to understand empathize other's fate and pain. These pains tie all people in China together. To resolve these conflicts, Yu Hua discusses in Ten Words: People, Leader, Writing, Lu Xun, Revolution, Disparity, Grassroots, Copycat, and Bamboozle. More generally, we need to reflect on what things went wrong during this period in three aspects: politics, literature, and issues related to the modern society.

In terms of politics, there is a big gap between people and the leader since the "leader" is sacred. Actually, I have some feelings about this in my life. The only closest moment for us to see the Chairman is when in the CCTV, and more specifically, is that he is greeting to the people when in the Spring Festival. This made me realize that there is a big distance between the highest leader and the people like me. This symptom can also be seen in the movie: *The Terror Live*, which implies the impassable gulf between two classes (the president and the people). However, the biggest issue is deifying the leader. Yu Hua (2011) illustrates this with a story

“The sun went down,” he had been heard to say. In those days Mao was commonly compared to a bright red sun, so the sun was not something to be talked of lightly, and at nightfall the most one could say was “It’s getting dark.” For him to say “The sun went down” was tantamount to saying “Mao Zedong went down.” (p. 38).

As we can see, all the things related to the leader, especially Mao Zedong at that time, have been marked sacred and untouchable, because of the excessive worship and the inviolable authority built by the government. This is abnormal when people are trying to impose the "crime" which they shouldn't have. In this environment, people have no freedom at all, thus the society cannot progress.

In terms of literature, people's aesthetic level is going backwards. Yu Hua depicts what he saw in his book

What was most memorable for me was to see bundles of books worth several hundred yuan being sold off for a throwaway price, for 10 or 12 yuan. No sooner did one salesman yell, “Bundle of books for 20 yuan,” than another would counter with an even more attractive deal: “Rock-bottom prices! Classics for 10 yuan a bundle!” Even the book vendors found this a bit unbelievable. “What kind of bookselling is this?” they said to themselves. “We might as well be selling wastepaper!” (p. 85).

This scene is so common that I can always see in the streets. This shows how the readers treat the classics, and how the sellers treat them. I have not experienced the time when the books were so rare that people had to queue up in the early morning, but I can imagine that how people love books which are masterpieces. As Yu Hua described, now these "valuable" books

are not popular at all. People don't read them but prefer to read "junk literature" written by the writer like Guo Jingming. These novels, catering for the absented-minded teenagers, are superficial, and may lead the students in a wrong way. Unfortunately, I have obsessed with these junks in my high school. When I read other books in depth, I realized those junks have no nutrition, and reading them is just a waste of time.

Over the past twenty years, our development has been uneven rather than comprehensive, and this lopsided development is compromising the health of our society.

It's fair to say that political reform was taking place in the 1980s, even if its pace was slower than that of economic reform. After Tiananmen, however, political reform ground to a halt, while the economy began breakneck development. Because of this paradox we find ourselves in a reality full of contradictions: conservative here, radical there; the concentration of political power on this side, the unfettering of economic interests on that; dogmatism on the one hand, anarchism on the other; toeing the line here, tossing away the rule book there. (p. 260).

Yu Hua gives us a summary in this paragraph: what are the conflicts and the comparisons between different places. In this big political reform, we can see some great development in some cities. For example, in Shenzhen, the Chinese government reduced the taxes and applied other policies, thus the economy and other industry were developing rapidly. However, the development is uneven, because the government did not apply the policies on the remote cities, thus they cannot benefit from the reform and revolution. These disparities lead to some behaviors like the copycat and bamboozle. The main reason behind this is just the uneven

distribution of resources. People receive different education, thus have different fields of vision. With poor eyesight, people may not be able to go forward, but to copycat others' result. People are pursuing the interests and profits unscrupulously. In one day, I hope we can have even distribution of educational resources to let all the people benefit from the reform.

As I said at the beginning, this book is made up of many short typical stories, and each of them well supports the main ideas of each chapter. In my opinion, these stories do reveal the facts which are hidden by the government. However, in the last five chapters, I feel that some statements are not strong enough compared to the first five chapters. That's not a coincidence. The first five chapters, which is writing, reading and so on, are mainly his personal experience. All the experiences of that period are not replicable, so they are very precious. Inevitably, in the last five chapters, Yu Hua comes into contact with reality. However, I think he is not well prepared for this, thus all the stories and all the data are stacked, which makes his whole chapter a bit heavy. Even at the end of these chapters, he does not clearly indicate the relationship between the stories and the reality, which makes me confused.

However, I think the postscript really reflects the main purpose of this book. In the postscript, he tells us a story when he was a dentist. He did not realize the pain on the worker until he saw that on the children when he was vaccinating. Only when he felt the pain did he realize he should take steps to reduce the pain. This is also true for the modern society now. As Yu Hua said: the pain of China is the pain of myself, and the pain connects with each other. Since the pain is unforgettable, we need to become stronger to avoid the pain in the future.

References

Yu, H. (2011). *China in Ten Words*. New York: Pantheon Books.