

Corrosion and Struggle of the Soul in the Den of Monsters

—Image of Zhao Huiming in the Novel *Corrosion*

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Abstract

The novel *Corrosion*, masterpiece of Mao Dun, accused the dark side of the society at that time. Zhao Huiming, the leading role in the novel *Corrosion*, was a young woman who was misguided first to be a spy and then hoped to break away from the spy organization—"den of monsters". The novel revealed the corrosion of dark society to the youth by the record of the inner struggle and the life of Zhao Huiming. The author tried to arouse the sympathy and concern of people for the youth by the tragedy of the youth in that era. The novel was tried to show that how the bad and repressive social environment affects the growth of youth. The first and the most important thing for the young people is to distinguish and choose the right road of growth. Even if one is misguided to deviate the right road, he/she can still return to the right direction by struggle and fight to the bad environment and evil forces.

Keywords

Corrosion, Struggle of Soul, Tragedy of Dilemma, Head for Hope

1. Introduction

As a masterpiece of Mao Dun, the novel *Corrosion* was set in the combination of Wang Jingwei and Japanese and the South-Anhui incident. The novel shows the complicated and repressive social environment at that time by the experiences of life of the leading role Zhao Huiming.

Born in a feudal bureaucratic family, Zhao Huiming was formed the habits of vanity, indulging in pleasure and luxury. Meanwhile, she sought the light and justice. For example, she took part in the student activism in her middle school

days, and joined the battlefield service group. In other words, she was a lovely and progressive girl full of sunshine indeed. Zhao Huiming left her family because she was dissatisfied with her feudal family and thought that life is a process of constant struggle. She was once a primary teacher after leaving her family. Though she could live in such a way throughout her life, unfortunately, he joined in the spy organization of Kuomintang by being naive in politics and married to a bad man. Since then, she was fallen into a den of monsters with intrigues and full of killing. Zhao Huiming was corroded in such a bad environment step by step and meanwhile struggled between “human nature” and “brutish nature” day by day.

The author adopted the form of diary to write the novel to enhance the authenticity, let the leading role to directly express her complicated and contradicted inner world and to expose the guilt of the ruling class and spy organization at that time who betrayed their country and brutally suppressed the people. The striking image of self-defense and sadly and indignant of the leading role was vividly presented.

This novel revealed us the importance to choose the correct direction for the growth. It also revealed that the fight to the dark side of society and search for the hope are required if one is misguided into a bad environment or organization. Therefore, it is still meaningful at present to read and analyze the novel of *Corrosion*.

2. Sinking of the Soul in the Environment Full of “Foxes Ghost”

In a society full of darkness and evil, the youth is without dispute the painful group for their being suppressed and confused for the life, just as the author said: “At that time, most of the young people were forced by the society environment. They felt much pain for that they cannot be unyielding in the society full of ‘foxes ghost’ spies and enemies and they could only swallow the grievances and could not claim. (Words in the preface of *Corrosion*.)” (Mao, 1955).

Zhao Huiming was only the epitome of the young people confused with life at that time. Her depressed and suspicious psychology full of emptiness and crafty, which was just the product of dark society with crisis and killing and clash. Zhao Huiming’s growth experience and the society environment determined the complexity of her character. For example, she had still conscience though she had degenerated; She was one of the “foxes ghost”, but she hated the society full of “foxes ghost”.

Zhao Huiming was once a student pursuit of progress in her middle school, but she was allured by the spy organization and difficult to extricate herself at last because of her vanity and flaunting her superiority. She cared more about the personal but not politics because she was born in a feudal family. She could not even distinguish the Communist Party of China and the Kuomintang of China. She just took the spy as a piece of work. She did not give up the work

even if she was not satisfy with it sometimes, because this work could bring her material comforts, which led her fall down deeper and deeper and accordingly become the “hunter” of the spy organization. So it is important to distinguish which is correct in the society.

Grown up from a bureaucratic family, the personal interests were given the priority and so she always became weak at the critical moment. For example, when she was forced to summon the revolutionary Xiaozhao, her former lover, to surrender, on one hand she was angry with the spy-master, on the other hand she managed to rescue Xiaozhao because of the love sprouted in her again. However, she came out with the secret that Xiaozhao asked her to care about the revolutionaries K and Ping as her achievements when the spy-master doubted her a little.

Zhao Huiming’ thoughts were always swayed because she was lack in courage and lost the correct direction of life (Wu, 1982). To deal with the danger environment, she unashamedly declared: “I am not enough mean, shamelessness and craft.” Moreover, she said: “I am a women who did not like a women. Why do not I dare? Why should I take good care about my body. I should take advantage of my body well (Mao, 1955)”. However, the surrounding oppression did not decrease by her such behavior of flaunting her superiority but came one after another. She was forced to be the bait by using her body again and again. However, she was still monitored and shot in the dark. These oppressions aroused her some resistance. When she was secondly forced to allure a revolutionary by using the form of having a romantic relationship, she angrily wrote in her diary: “I still have soul. I still have conscience. I have also sense of shame.”

She was once forced to speak out the secret that K and Ping were revolutionaries. Though she was upset with that and felt the reproach of the conscience, she self-justified by “I am not really willing to hurt them.” “I just try to protect Xiaozhao.” etc. She covered K and Ping later, but she said that they had many suspicious and had important organization missions when the spy-master questioned her again. After that, she self-justified again: “I have cover them before, but they do not appreciate that. These words are nothing. The real danger comes from their internal spy. It is not related with me (Mao, 1955)”. These repeatedly self-justification showed that Zhao Huiming had extreme individualism. Zhao Huiming sunk continuously at first just because she loved for pleasure and comfort and meanwhile was lack of correct guidance.

3. Struggle of Soul in the Den of Monsters

On one hand, she madly traced and arrested revolutionaries looking like a hunting dog under the oppressions and orders of the spy-master, on the other hand, she was a young offender and victim. Her soul was not corroded totally and the conscience retained still some in her mind. So she was often tortured by the conflicted internal mind. These mental conflicts can be seen in the diary: “I extremely hate the surrounding environment but I still piddle day after day.” “I

look down on myself recently more and more because I have some “hopes”. “Sometimes I feel pain because of the dream. I have many daydreams. I have friends again, so I can speak my mind again.” “There will be an earthshaking change which will bury my past. A brand new me will talk and laugh in broad daylight, and I there will have a work suited for me (Mao, 1955)”. These lyric monologues express her pain of soul and how she hated what she was used to be and how she wished to start a new life incisively and vividly.

The oppression of life aroused Zhao Huiming’s dissatisfaction to the environment and wanted to struggle with the dark society. In the diary of the September 15th, she wrote: “It is obvious that even if I can get him back, I am incapable to nurture him. Is there any method for me to get rid of the environment? “I cannot let my son know I on one hand hate my surrounding environment, on the other hand I peddle one day by day. Especially, I have not revenged yet. I wish I can revenge ruthlessly on all I hate and contempt all by myself without any worries.” This confession was justification and self-consolation for which she had to abandon her new born son. It penetratingly expressed her complicated state of mind that she extremely hated the surrounding environment but was unable to extricate herself (Chen, 1984; Chen, 1997).

Zhao Huiming had not enough courage to fight with the evil forces even she was hate them. Her attitude was negative sometimes. In the diary of September the twenty-second, Zhao Huiming wrote that she thought about the intention that Shunying persuaded her to join in Xiqiang’s group sometimes and evaluated the offensive of the surrounding evil forces sometimes when she hid in the air-raid shelter. Suddenly a cry came from the front of the shelter: “Anti-aircraft gun had launched!” “The consonant full of shelter disappeared immediately and only left the sound of breathing.” In the environment of fear, she had such bad mood: “It is good if a bomb falls now and I die immediately.” This kind of state of mind shows that she felt helpless in dealing with the evil environment but she did not still lose her conscience.

In the diary of December 30th, she wrote: “I will go to an unfamiliar place which is called university area. I might see what I looked like six years ago among students. Maybe I can see the students who are allured and forced to go toward a road to be destructed without choice step by step. Is there anything more brutal than this? Let me experience the cursed past again! (Mao, 1955)” This words show the unspeakable pain of Zhao Huiming for the living environment. The oppression and unfair undoubtedly aroused her dissatisfaction and hate to the evil environment and the struggle for the light.

The understanding to the evil spy-organization, the reappearance of Xiaozhao, the help of K and Ping, and the letter from her old father urged Zhao Huiming much firmly to struggle with the evil environment. She was moved and affected by their great ideal, strong will and sincere concern. Especially the appearance of N, whose experiences of being cheated were very like what happened to herself six years ago, more aroused her determination to get rid of the dark spy-organization (Wei, 1991; Wei, 1992).

4. Tragedy of Dilemma

Lu Xun once said: “Tragedy is to show people the destruction of valuable things in human life.” Zhao Huiming joined in the students’ battlefield service group hot-bloodedly as a young beautiful woman first, leaving her feudal family just liking rushing out of the clouds, but at last she fell in the spy organization, a huge “dye vat”, and lost her love and passion for life. She had to live in the struggle of humanity and beastliness. For example, in her diary in December the third, she wrote:” How terrible! Doors are all closed to me! I have achieved nothing! These feelings are strengthened day and day. The shadow comes from all around though I still have pink dreams. I have to give in the reality no matter how strong I am. It looks like all do not permit me to go along a bright road. Why?” “Because you have a dishonorable past! A past stained with blood of sin! The cold voice sounds in my ears again. Cannot the shadow of the past disappear? Is it going to accompany me always?” “And now because still it is-Ha Ha, Just look at your badge! That cold voice changed into strange laugh causing my hair stand up, just like an owl’s whistling.” “I bowed my head, I unconsciously took out the badge from my underwear and turned it around. How I wish to swallow it immediately. However, can one be separated from others and cannot be forgiven by such piece of thing? (Mao, 1955)” This interior monologue shows that the dilemma Zhao Huiming was faced—she wished to do something good but meantime she was restricted to the society environment. Thus it is difficult for her to get rid of the tragic fate. Though Zhao Huiming wanted to save herself from the den of monsters and walked on the road of light, she was day and night worried about what she had done to the revolutionaries (Liang, 2012).

The fact that Xiaozhao was murdered caused Zhao Huiming to break with the corroded environment surrounding her, but can she successfully struggle out from the huge “dye vat” and start a new life? The answer is “very difficult”. On one hand, the failure that she tried to get in touch with K and Ping the secondly showed that the road going to join the Communist Party of China was broken. On the other hand, could the spy organization permit she leave? The answer is obviously NO! The reason is that she know too many secrets. The spy organization could not let her leave away alive. Her killer instinct and the character of misfit with the environment could not guarantee her safe if still she stayed in the spy-group. Therefore, her tragic fate is almost doomed. It is not only the tragedy of Zhao Huiming, but also it is the tragedy of the youth in that era.

5. The Path to Hope

However, Zhao Huiming still had hope even if she live in such a horrible environment. The path to hope is the awakening quickly and fight firmly against the fate and finally achieve spiritual enhancement and personality independence. After she was cheated by Xiqiang, was played with by the spy Chen and chased by a hooligan spy, Zhao Huiming awakened gradually and tried to shake of the spy organization. She had made great progress in her mind. For example, she

refused the enticement of Shunying to be a traitor, and she also tried her best to save the student “N”. In her last diary, she wrote that she had to do something, she had to believe that human effort can achieve anything. However, she did not make up her mind yet, and she always swayed between staying in the spy organization and seeking a new life.

So it is very important for her to persist in the awakening state and to fight with the spy organization and the dark society at that time, she can have a bright future.

Resistance means to fight against the dark forces, such as the evil spy organization and violence at that time. To do this, great courage and confident faith are required.

She should continuously try to seek the group of the Communist Party of China, the representative of the people and the progress, the strongest force to fight with the dark forces, and get their support. She also should do something beneficial to the people and the society to gain the forgiveness of the Communist Party of China since she had stained the blood of the Communist.

Surely, this path cannot be smooth. There will be sacrifice and pain. Zhao can successfully achieve the light place only after she overcomes these barrier and difficulties. She should find the correct direction, unit the people with the same ideals, and steadfastly go towards the target. The ideal should be satisfied with the tendency of the times. She should bravely confront the dark spy organization and the reality and do the things that conform to moral and conscience and all beneficial to people.

6. Conclusions

This paper discusses the growth path of the leading role in the novel *Corrosion* written by Mao Dun. The reason and the inevitability of Zhao Huiming’s falling into the spy organization—den of monsters are analyzed. The psychological activities of Zhao who was grown in feudal family and degenerated to be a hunter of the spy organization but meanwhile tried to break out of the den of monsters are analyzed also. The struggle of Zhao’s inner mind, her hate to the spy organization which she was in but she could not get rid of it, are described and discussed detailed. We can see from the novel that the tragedy of Zhao is only an epitome of the youth in that era. The novel profoundly revealed the dark society in that time and the aspiration of the youth to the light, and the most important thing is to distinguish and choose the correct direction of life.

However, this paper also shows that one can still find hopes and take the right road by unremitting struggle even if in a bad and repressive social environment and is misguided to fall in a “den of monsters”.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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