Abstract

Although Liang Shi Qiu (梁实秋) is one of the most renowned prose writers of the contemporary era, there are relatively fewer studies on him and his works, as compared to his fellow counterparts such as Lu Xun and Hu Shi. This is due to the once hot debate between Lu Xun and him, whereby he was condemned to be a capitalist traitor of communism. Undeterred by the unfortunate turn of historic event, Liang Shi Qiu continued to produce marvellous literary works. The most rewarding being his series of prose entitled “Proses of A Cottager” (《雅舍小品》), written at a place he named ‘Ya She’ in Sichuan province. This series earned him the much deserved respect in modern literary world.

The success and charm of Liang Shi Qiu’s “Proses of A Cottager” lie not so much in their themes, but the perspective, insights and serenity they bring to the readers. And more often than not, these are portrayed with an invaluable tool: humour. Probably to most people, the first impression that one gets from his proses is his humorous language, a tool that helps illuminate the uniqueness of his literature. Hence, an important approach to appreciate his proses is to understand its humour; its mechanism and its techniques.

Amidst the enormous literary survey on humour theories, an eminent work had been produced by Victor Raskin. In his book “Semantic Mechanism of Humor”, he established the ‘Semantic Script Theory of Humour’, which provided a unifying theoretical and formal basis for the various intuitions people share about humour. Furthermore, it is a conceptually simple and an intuitively appealing explanation of the human ability to produce and understand jokes.
Though it is superior to many other theories, it has several limitations, which distanced itself from the genre of prose-writing. Hence, to utilize this important theory in prose analysis, the author has borrowed relevant concepts from various disciplines to enrich his theory, such as the concept of ‘defamiliarization’ from the Russian formalism. This in turn renders the thesis multidisciplinary in nature.

In summary, the author has attempted to assess the structure of the mechanism and presentation of humour in Liang Shi Qiu’s “Proses of A Cottager” by using the revised script-based semantic theory, followed by a critical analysis of his sense of humour.