

# A Comparative Analysis of the Image of Ah Q and Falstaff in the Cultural Perspective

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**Abstract.** In the connotation of the characters of Ah Q and Falstaff, both of them show a comedic and laughter-inducing quality, and trigger the aesthetic pleasure of readers' contemptuous ridicule of "ugliness", but there are still significant differences in their comic expressions, which are closely related to the authors' own cultural sphere and the social reality in which they live. Therefore, this paper tries to compare the differences between Ah Q and Falstaff's characters in the cultural context, arguing that the two characters present the colors of joy in sorrow and sorrow in joy, and then return to the cultural reflection of the two authors and the discussion of the need to reconstruct the cultural psychology of society from anthropological ontology.

**Keywords:** Culture; Social Reality; Cultural Reflection.

## 1. Introduction

"On the Power of the Satanical School of Poetry" discusses the relationship between the "heart" and poetry: "All human hearts have poetry, and poetry is not unique to the poet, but whenever one reads a poem, one's heart is interpreted, that is, one has a poem by the poet." [1] In Lu Xun's view, "heart" and "mind" are connected, literature is somehow not a literature belonging to one person alone, literature can also be a public human product. Wittgenstein emphasizes that the boundary of language is also the boundary of thought, but at the same time the boundary of thought can also break the boundary of language, which in the ancestors of human beings was not only the psychological basis for the germination of language, but also the cornerstone for the identity and continuity of the community. Poetry, as an act of human expression, is the medium between the "heart" and the "mind". The same can be said of literature, where "a few waves of "likeness" or "resemblance" are always stirred up in the long rivers of peoples in different cultural contexts. They are not linked by the spatial and temporal units in people's minds, but by the "annual cycle" in the development of their respective nationalities, and it is for this reason that Falstaff and Ah Q are linked together." [2]

In *Poetics*, Aristotle stated, "As we have said, the comedy is an imitation of the lesser, but certainly not all bad; the comic is only part of the ugly." [3] One of the commonalities between Ah Q and Falstaff lies in the comic overtones of the characters' surfaces due to their slapstick. They overflow to some extent with clownish comic hilarity, with their masculine defiance in the face of power and their loud self-aggrandizement. Lu Xun once clearly stated in "The Cause of *The True Story of Ah Q*" that the characterization of Ah Q is full of comic elements, "Because of the title 'Happy Words', some unnecessary comic elements are haphazardly added, which are in fact disproportionate in the whole piece. The signature is 'Ba Ren', which takes the meaning of 'the people in the lower part of the country' and is not elegant." [4] And foreign researchers also focus on the image of Falstaff's comedy. Johnson, despite many moral taboos, still felt that Falstaff "always carefree, with a passionate and powerful laugh" [5], Maurice Morgan in the article "On the dramatic character Sir John Falstaff" for this the best comic role in all literature defense.

Faced with similar historical circumstances, the two talented writers also made similar historical and aesthetic reflections on the characters under them. However, similarity does not mean identical, for Falstaff and Ah Q are still two independent "human standing boards", playing their own unique light in the literary corridor. From the second chapter onwards, it is no longer published in the column of 'Happy Words', but moved to the column of 'New Literature and Arts' [6] and Falstaff "is a universe and not some kind of decoration". [7] It is clear that these two characterizations are not the

nonsense and weirdness they appear to be. The definition of the two characters should not only be based on their external behavior and ultimate end, but also on the identity of the characters and the author's cultural attempts. Ah Q focuses on the mental comic, which is unconscious and stands on the position of the weak, and presents an aesthetic effect of sorrow with joy in general. However, Falstaff is a clear self-conscious mocker, and the comic is only his disguise, which gives people a reading experience of joy with sorrow through his external behavior.

After collecting data, the author finds that the comparative study of Ah Q and Falstaff has not yet received sufficient attention from domestic researchers, and most of the only papers focus on issues such as the vagabonds of the spiritual home and the importance of ideological transformation in the context of social change, without fully discussing the cultural characteristics carried by the two characters. Therefore, the paper will try to cut through the cultural threshold to deeply depict the images of the two, and further consider the creative intentions and inner laws behind them.

## 2. The Origin of Identity: Feudal Patriarchal Culture and God Culture

Ah Q and Falstaff are created by the great Chinese and British writers respectively, and their images are bound to carry different cultural attributes, and such two different cultural attributes are strongly linked to their social identities.

In the consensus of the academic community, Ah Q is generally regarded as a backward peasant figure, and Liu Zhongshu stated: "Ah Q is a typical wandering peasant, and a backward one at that. The image is concentrated lowering oneself of the peasants at that time, such as the triumphalism of self-contempt and self-congratulation, the forgetfulness of humiliation and pain, the bullying of the strong and the bullying of the weak, and the venting of indignation at the weak after being humiliated." [8] This view was also the mainstream view in the first and middle of the twentieth century. The reason for this is that, on the one hand, from the point of view of the "world," and in the context of the New Culture Movement, "the spiritual criticism of the nation" is a natural part of the "democracy and enlightenment" banner. On the other hand, there is the "work-centeredness", which takes the text as the starting point. Such a perception is actually due to the fact that the main events of Ah Q takes place in Wei Zhuang, thus giving the reader the illusion that Ah Q was born and raised in the area and was born a peasant. What is the true identity of Ah Q? Ultimately, it is necessary to go back to Lu Xun's original work to explore the source and find evidence in the original text to support it. In the preface of the first chapter, Lu Xun expressed clearly that Ah Q "although he mostly lives in Wei Zhuang, he often stays elsewhere and cannot be said to be a member of Wei Zhuang ", [9] which destroys the root of Ah Q's peasant identity. Lu Xun's "Letter to the Editor of the Weekly Opera" said, " *The Government Inspector* by Gogol makes the actors say directly to the audience, 'You laugh at yourselves! My method is to make the reader wonder who he is writing about other than himself, so that he will be put off at once and become a spectator, and become suspicious that he is writing about himself and about all people, thus opening the way to introspection. But I see that none of the critics have ever noticed this point.'" [10] In Lu Xun's structural mode of "seeing and being seen", Lu Xun's cold tone puts the reader in the position of a spectator, contemptuously mocking both sides of the conflict in the play, and then abruptly ends at the climax, completing the abrupt turn, allowing the reader and the characters in the play to become one. However, it ends abruptly at the climax, allowing the reader and the characters to become one, constituting a deeper level of "seeing and being seen". Lu Xun's purpose is to make the reader suspect that he is writing about himself and to ask the reader to reflect on himself, which proves that Ah Q is a projection of the reader's image. The reader, of course, are not the vast majority of laborers, who are still mostly illiterate, but the same class as Lu Xun, the class of his own. It is because of this class identity, exposure to "benevolence and morality" and "cannibalism" of "sage scriptures" that the feudal patriarchal culture takes root so deeply in Ah Q's body. In the Qing dynasty, under the rule of the scholars, loyal subjects generally have braids under the standard of judgment. Ah Q is a loyal believer, for fake foreign devils called "foreigners", that " if braid is false, it is no longer qualified to be a human being" [11], and the wife

of the fake foreign devil "does not jump the well for the fourth times, who is not a good woman" [11]. In the relationship between men and women, Ah Q has always been very strict about the "great harm of men and women", and has the righteousness to reject heretics. He will also recite "No posterity is the greatest of the three unfilial acts", "No offspring". At this level, Ah Q is a typical corrupt Confucian, and the psychology of feudal patriarchal culture is no more suitable for the performance of the identity than the traditional scholar.

In the early 1920s, although China had changed its dynasty through the efforts of the Xinhai Revolution, "the old calendar was still the old calendar," and progress in the field of thought and culture could not be achieved overnight. Lu Xun was not optimistic about the change of mind of the intellectuals in general: "I am still afraid that what I see is not the predecessor of the modern age, but the one afterwards, or even twenty or thirty years later." [12] As Engels pointed out in *Letter to Philadelphia*: "The tragic conflict is between the demand of historical necessity and the practical impossibility of realizing this demand." [13] Ah Q, whose spirit is twisted and distorted by the heavy oppression of the old society, and whose life of "wanting to be a slave but not being able to" highlights this tragic conflict between the old and the new era, while the comic comedy exists only as a complementary component in the whole text. This makes the text in general present an emotional atmosphere of "joy in sorrow", and researchers at home and abroad analyze the image of Ah Q in Lu Xun's writing as "bitter pleasure" and "tears in laughter" and other aesthetic experiences.

If Ah Q is a firm believer in feudal patriarchal culture, then Falstaff is, to a certain extent, a "gamer" of God's culture. Lu Xun said of his character creation that the character he created "often has his mouth in Zhejiang, his face in Beijing, and his clothes in Shanxi" [14], and is made up of various elements, so as to create a national soul, and thus has a certain synthesis. In addition, the identity of Ah Q's lower class, cannot be determined to a specific character prototype of Ah Q. In contrast, Shakespeare's Falstaff is a knightly aristocracy, with Sir John Oldcastle and Sir John Fastolf as the main archetypes. Oldcastle was the leader of the Lollards, who advocated not paying taxes to the Papacy, depriving the church of its estates, and preparing an armed insurrection in 1415, which was unsuccessful due to leaks of information. Oldcastle was a good friend of Prince Henry. The prince had urged him to leave paganism, but he continued to maintain ties with the Lollards. He was arrested in 1417 and sentenced to death for treason and paganism. The prince jokingly called Falstaff "the old lad of the castle". If the words "old" and "castle" are joined together, they make up "Oldcastle". Fastolf, on the other hand, was a major figure in the Battle of Herring, where the French army of about 3,000 to 4,000 met a very small British army, and the final defeat was attributed to the cowardice of Earl Clermont who did not allow the artillery to have its maximum effect. In short, Oldcastle is a typical anti-God, and Fastolf is a defender of a secular national kingship state. Shakespeare's prototype of these two characters can basically be said to have taken their deeds, while their names were changed to Falstaff due to the opposition of Oldcastle's descendants, which does not affect their substance. Therefore, Falstaff's identity as a player of God's culture and a manifestation of his own self has an ideological ground. The chivalry born of God's culture is supposed to be brave, respectful and honorable, but Falstaff is the most successful deconstruction. He is a veteran of dirty tricks, swearing and gambling. "Falstaff is a small man with a lot of flaws ..... He bases himself on his most pleasing character. His perpetual carefree, enthusiastic and powerful laughter incessantly relaxes one all the more, because his little cleverness is neither noble nor ambitious, but merely frivolous witticisms for relief, energetic but not offensive." [5] Aristotle once expressed the view that epic poetry is used to show heroes, tragedy is used to express the hopeless sorrow of ordinary people, and comedy is written about people who often make mistakes. Fastolf becomes a laughing stock, a clown and thus an object of ridicule in and out of the space of the play because of his apparently silly mistakes, and in this stage he has become a man with a perfect comic character under Shakespeare's writing. He sees through the political prospects of the nobility, does not desire the glory of war, consciously pleases Prince Henry, and does not care about his career. At the end of the play, the audience still retains Falstaff bitterly, not only as a laughing stock, but also to value his spiritual freedom of stretching.

### 3. Cultural Attempts: The Failure of Pursuing Authority Culture Integration and the Success of Counter-integration in Parodying Authority Culture

Falstaff seems to be in a noble and chivalrous class, but it has already fallen. Ah Q is an abstract representative of the lower class, so in a sense they can be grouped together as one class of people - the lower class. Both of them are in a society where social stratification is very obvious and very different, and the upper class means that the share of authority is more in the whole society, and the lower class shows the tendency to be conscious or unconscious of this authority culture.

The failure of Ah Q's quest for cultural integration with authority reinforces its tragic tone. One is the oppression of the subordinate. "He scolds those who are slow of speech, and beats those who are weak of strength. Ah Q, even in normal times, must be spiteful when he sees you, let alone after the humiliation?" [15] The second is to pretend that he is the superior. "How dare such a bearded thing speak out of turn?" [16] If you are in a position of power, you will be praised by others " Ah Q can really do it! At this time, Ah Q bares shoulders, staying thin and languid in front of him. Others cannot judge whether the words are sincere or ridicule. However, Ah Q likes it very much." [17] There are two objects that Ah Q pursued for recognition, one is the feudal forces and the other is the revolutionary forces. Ah Q shows a friendly attitude toward both. First, the surname is an essential element in the composition of the feudal forces, and the confirmation of the surname is to some extent an identity, but Zhao Xiucui deprives Ah Q of his surname at the very beginning "How can you be surnamed Zhao! You are not worthy of the name Zhao." [18] And Ah Q's response is "not to speak, not to speak, want to back up, and does not argue that his surname is indeed Zhao, only to touch the left cheek with his hand, and exit with the protector. He is reprimanded by the ground protector outside, and gives the protector two hundred Wen for the backsheesh reluctantly. [18]

Ah Q's attitude towards the revolution is representative of the attitude of the oppressed and exploited class towards the revolution. When Ah Q thinks he has "surrendered to the revolutionary party", he "walks out on the street and sees everything as it is". [19] This shows his understanding of the revolution, that after the revolution, everything should not be "the same as before", but he is "still hungry", and he is excluded from the good ideal after the revolution. No matter whether Ah Q's understanding of the Xinhai Revolution is correct or not, he "yearns" for the revolution, but the revolution does not give him the identity of the revolutionary party and does not bring changes to his life, so he has no choice but to die.

Ah Q's integration is undoubtedly a failure, and the result of that failure is wandering. On the one hand, the wandering is in life, "Ah Q has no home, living in the temple of local god of the land in Wei Zhuang, and has no fixed occupation." On the other hand, he is wandering in the spirit, "He himself does not know what he seeks." [20] In the face of this typical character, Lu Xun said, "if a slave stands in front of him, he will be saddened and saddened, saddened so as to mourn his misfortune, and saddened so as to anger his indisputable", and has always had an attitude of both pity and anger towards "beggars". In this regard, Fu Bo in "Looking for a spiritual home for vagabond -a different perspective on Falstaff and Ah Q" stated that "The form Lu Xun for expression of Ah Q, is to make people feel sad in the laughter, in the resentment of thought, so that the reader in the form of comedy, to understand the content of tragedy."

In contrast, Falstaff's experience is slightly different, and therefore more comical. At first reading, Falstaff often appears as Hall's flatterer, and at the same time a question arises: Why did Hall kill Falstaff in the end just because of his puffery? Such a "crime" is comparatively light. However, once Falstaff is presented as an authoritative cultural parodist, all the plot developments can be understood. There are two reasons for Falstaff's identity. One is the metaphorical meaning of the body's "belly of resistance", and the other is "gender", as Falstaff represents a historically disadvantaged woman, and the disadvantaged woman is a different person from the powerful man, regardless of her status. The two groups with differences will form a counterbalance to each other, and the differences is in a way a kind of opposition and rebellion. Weak women pose a feminine threat to the gender violence and power machinations of powerful men. First of all, the body metaphor of belly symbolizes resistance. It is not uncommon to use a person's body or a part of it to symbolize a person or a character trait that

the person possesses. Falstaff's intestines, the bowels of his large belly, are a metaphor for himself and are often referred to as the most important part of his body, such as "fat intestines" and "running with your intestines". Bakhtin has referred to viscera, such as the intestines, as a highly meaningful thing associated with the carnival tradition: "The abdomen is not just eaten and swallowed, it is also eaten ..... Further, the entrails are associated with death, with slaughter, with murder, because to remove them means to kill. It is likewise associated with birth, because the abdomen also has a reproductive function." [21] The central role of the abdomen as rhetoric, as a concrete manifestation of the cultural carnival, is to become the rebellious and material other of the Machiavellianism politics of the dramatic plot. By renaming Falstaff "Belly Sir John", Hall jokingly acknowledges and combats the power of Falstaff's belly. Falstaff has no sublime, invisible virtues, but only his own hedonistic gut, while Hall, in order to become the ideal perfect king, must wait for the right opportunity to renounce and reject the concrete incarnation of the principle of enjoyment. Secondly, as for gender, there is no slighting of women here. Falstaff's cowardice on the battlefield, his pretending to be dead, his licentiousness towards carnal desires, and all other actions allude to the delicate and feminine nature of early England's system of distinguishing between physical and spiritual, refined and vulgar, and masculine and feminine comparisons. Egalitarianism and feminism do not mean the erasure of the natural differences between men and women. Falstaff himself describes it as "my skin hangs loose, like an old woman's fat robe". [22] If this stops at the level of attire, then the description of his belly as "full of tongues" mirrors the "rumors, painted with tongues". Falstaff's talkativeness, like that of a woman, can easily create a polyphonic phenomenon in public opinion, threatening the state power that tries to control all discourse, and is a potential source of anti-government authority counterpart discourse.

The moment Hall finally chooses to kill Falstaff is a sign that the parodist has attracted the attention of the authorities. The devourer is devoured, but the audience's love for the character is obvious from the point of view of receptive aesthetics, as evidenced by Engels' claim that Falstaff is "the greatest dramatic character of all". Falstaff is not a martyr with aspirations, but a deformed child of the Renaissance.

In short, Ah Q's flattering and ingratiating integration in the face of the dual feudal and revolutionary forces fails, while Falstaff's revenge against the culture of authority in the face of state power is proved to be successful by his own murder from the opposite side .

#### **4. Cultural Reflection: the Reality of Joy in Sorrow and Joy in Sorrow**

The writer's attitude toward his characters connotes his view of a certain reality in society. Ah Q was written in 1921, and the story took place around 1911. Henry IV was written around 1596-1597, and the story took place around 1105. Both of them can be regarded as historical dramas, while the writers do not only portray history, but also integrate the spiritual culture of history with the real society, so as to "draw the attention of healing" in real life.

In 1911, China carried out the Xinhai Revolution in a semi-colonial and semi-feudal land, but the result of the revolution was only the removal of an emperor. "The fox has gone to the cave, the row of spouses has made an appearance". What caused China to fall into a constant loop was what Lu Xun, one of the first intellectuals to awaken, was thinking about. In the midst of the crisis, Zhang Taiyan's interpretation of the nation's roots and the reorganization of the Chinese nation's past spiritual and cultural heritage, was to reconstruct the national bond by demonstrating the breadth and depth of the cultural dimension, relying on civilization to form a superior nation. Although Lu Xun later joined the New Culture Movement, his approach to the spiritual transformation of the nation was still much inspirational during his stay in Japan. Around 1900, Lu Xun could not stand the feudal ideas of the teachers at the Jiangnan Marine Academy and Jiangnan Land Academy and went to Japan to study, which was undoubtedly another path that led Lu Xun to abandon medicine for literature and criticize the nationality. Under the influence of the Japanese intellectual and literary circles, Zhou Shuren became suspicious of the ideas of scientific salvation, industrial salvation and political reform that

prevailed among the Chinese students studying abroad and the foreign wanderers of the WeiXin Party, thus opening up a path of independent "contemplation". He found that Chinese scholars at that time had a straightforward and passionate patriotic will, and it was their urgent task to prescribe a remedy for the ailing China, while the most obvious difference between China and the West at that time was reflected in science, industry and democratic politics. Therefore, most of the foreign students who went to Japan from China studied industrial technology and the political system. The enthusiasm for science, industry and democratic politics concealed the hidden danger that they attached importance to "material" and "plurality" while ignoring "spiritual" and "personal" thinking. Lu Xun once again chiseled his penetrating thoughts in a calm manner. According to his own research on the relationship between the development of Western science and the evolution of the humanities, the "spirit" and "individual" of the humanities, that is, the glory of ancient Greek rationality and the Renaissance, were the "deep and bottomless pole" of the continuous development of Western science and politics in modern times. However, with the development of science and technology, material abundance and the maturity of democratic politics, the West gradually developed a "cultural bias" that disdains the spiritual and the personal, which further increased the misunderstanding of Chinese scholars. They regarded the "material" and "multitude" of Western civilization as the standard and as the root of all existence. The few advanced people, even if they noticed the ideas, were unable to address the crux of China's ailments. Lu Xun used *Ah Q* to depict the ideological crisis in China. Although he joined the revolution, he did not know what it was to allude to the failure of the Xinhai Revolution and to emphasize the importance of "man establishment", and *Ah Q's* comedy was overshadowed by a layer of sadness.

At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in England, the long reign of Elizabeth was almost over, the high national sentiment in the years of struggle with the invincible fleet had gradually been replaced by a war-weary mentality, and the artificial prosperity brought by overseas expansion and plundering had begun to peel away like cheap gold plating, revealing its decaying nature. The old feudal power was struggling to die, and the new bourgeoisie was recklessly carrying out the primitive accumulation of capital. According to Morgen, "Prince Henry put down the rebellion, seriously expressing the author's idea of upholding the centralized monarchy and opposing feudalism," [23] and Shakespeare is criticizing Falstaff's rebellion, which is obviously contradictory to the final "If you are not too tired of fat, our humble author will continue to write this story, including Sir John, and the beautiful French Katharine poetry make everyone happy. " [24] Falstaff has the lust of animal nature, but also the imagination of a man of talent. He laughs not because he feels something funny, but out of the desire to laugh. He does not sit peacefully in his chair like Marquis in *The Misanthrope*, but turns around, jumps around, puts on all kinds of faces, and boldly uses all kinds of words to describe his thoughts. Falstaff's nature is not bad, but he likes to make fun of it. When he is insulted, he returns the insults and expletives with aggressive insults, without holding a grudge: "Good men, boys, children, good people, all the names of good friends belong to you! How about that! Shall we make fun? Let's improvise a play, right?" [25] He would reveal his misbehavior without guilt, "Are you listening to me, Hall? You know that in the realm of innocence Adam fell. What might poor Jack Fastolf do in these evil times? You see I have a little more flesh than others, and therefore a little frailer." [26] This scandalous character is one of the most endearing favorites of Shakespeare's writing. The reason is that his spiritual elegance is purely natural, and Shakespeare's soul and his mind are in harmony and unity. Although Falstaff is finally abandoned by Hall, this is a political view unique to Shakespeare. On the one hand, it aims to preserve for himself such pleasures beyond the political necessity of non-love, and on the other hand to praise the heroic image of Henry V, where the king represents a force for progress. The succession of Henry IV is no less than a declaration of war against the feudal forces and the monastic class, showing at the same time certain characteristics of politics and the solitary character of the king, who has no equal and who, as king, must subordinate the highest affairs to the "needs of the whole". It is true that abandonment evokes "pity", but the nature of his life, driven by desire, is joy, and the sadness of the end cannot conceal the joy of his personality, which is joy with sadness. Shakespeare often has a commendable unique insight into the "political system", for example,

in *Hamlet*, the old Hamlet and Claudius's struggle for the throne, is it due to the former's indiscretion? In *King Lear*, in the face of the succession to the throne, are the feelings that serve as the basis for the succession questionable? In *Henry IV*, there is no doubt that Shakespeare is still fond of Falstaff, and some kind of insistence on the "political system" is still retained, so it is easy to see his ambivalence.

To sum up, even though both Ah Q and Falstaff are comical, there is still a difference between "joy in sorrow" and "sorrow in joy", and this difference is closely related to the cultural identity behind both Ah Q and Falstaff, and the author's arrangement and attitude towards their ultimate end. As a morbid character condensed from the many problems of Chinese national tradition, Ah Q is a "scholar" who clings to the feudal consciousness, desperately trying to fit in with the authority but spiritually isolated, and the author hopes to make the reader feel the core of the tragedy with a comic image, to feel sorrow in the midst of laughter and to ponder in the midst of resentment. Falstaff is the link between various social relations, and Engels used the proper noun "Falstaffian scene" to express his wide range of activities, from princes to rogues, but among all kinds of social figures he is the one Shakespeare liked the most, with conscience giving way to nature, driven entirely by desire unrestrainedly, as if a masquerade of ideas. This is a different from the intellect of the theoretician, an orgy that belongs exclusively to the poet and the artist.

It can be said that Ah Q and Falstaff are unique cultural phenomena in two different cultural contexts. The two writers show the cultural personality of their respective images according to their different creative intentions and methods, and through such different choices, we can also glimpse the differences of the deep cultural mechanisms hidden under the texts in the process of different times. In the lower circles, Ah Q firmly believes in the culture of the Shi but is abandoned by the Shi, and Falstaff rebels against the culture of chivalry and is killed by Henry V in reverse. In the lower circles, they either firmly believe in or rebel against the culture of the ruling class, but ultimately cannot escape their unfortunate fate. On the other hand, the Shi under the emperor and the knights under the king, as the upper circle, were bound to drown in the dust with the tide of history. Thus, for both the upper and lower circles, such a culture or a certain political system embedded in culture is not in line with anthropological ontology or the philosophy of subjectivity practice, that is, the psychological construction of culture is based on social production, and its reconstruction will be a more long-term, basic and important thing for human survival, and this is what the two great writers made to reflect on the culture of the society at that time. Yu Dafu once said of Lu Xun: "A nation without great figures is the most miserable group of creatures in the world. A nation with great figures that people do not know how to support, love, and admire them is a slave state without hope." [27] Standing on the basis of the reflections of his predecessors, Engels in his *To Giuseppe Canepa* gave a clear answer as to where the spiritual and cultural orientation of the future is directed: "In place of that old bourgeois society in which there are classes and class antagonisms, there will be such a union, where the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." [28] Ah Q and Falstaff are like mirrors held up, more toward our greatest capacity to pursue a fresh life, not only toward nature.

"The inexpressible Ah Q" and "the inexpressible Falstaff". Since their publication, *The True Story of Ah Q* and *Henry IV* have entered the horizon of literary critics, and their discussion has never stopped. From the Enlightenment trend in the 1920s and the national salvation trend in the 1930s and 1940s, the discussion of Ah Q has been influenced by the criticism and reflection on the "spiritual triumph" of the national nature of the young people of the New Culture Movement, such as Mao Dun and the "thinking generation" of May Fourth. From the 1950s to the end of the 1970s, when the popular sentiment for the victory of the New Democratic Revolution was so high that it could not be restrained, we affirmed the legitimacy of the revolution in the capacity of peasants, and then reflected on the failure of the Xinhai Revolution in which the people were in an empty position. After the reform and opening-up, we started from the spiritual predicament of human beings, and raised the desperate struggle of life presented in the cycle of "spiritual victory-reality failure" in terms of life philosophy, and the inner thread was from reality to spirit. In Falstaff's discussion, the early part was idealism, such as Morgan's "private impression" and Bradley's "poetry for the sake of poetry",

concentrating on artistic aesthetics. On the other hand, there were the "historicists", such as E. E. Stoll, who believed that Shakespeare was merely a collage of historical profiles using primitive and crude techniques, turning "Shakespeareanization" into "Schillerization". "It is easy to see that both failed to form a correct perception of Shakespeare's historical plays, and it was only in modern times that this situation was reversed.

The continuous emergence of new views in the critical circles proves that after a literary work written by a writer, it no longer belongs to the writer alone, but is shared by the reader, the world, the work, and the author, filling in the gaps and opening up the wasteland in the intertwined relationship between the four. In the past research papers, Ah Q and Falstaff have been taken as examples of vagabonds in their spiritual homes and those who fail to reform their minds in the context of social change, and to a certain extent, they are placed in the category of "ugly" or even "bad", but in this paper, we look at the society and its culture that caused this situation. This paper, however, takes the society and its cultural state, as well as the future direction of its cultural development, as the point of entry, and sympathizes with Ah Q and Falstaff with historical understanding.

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