

# *The Vessel of Sorrow—Based on Bakhtin's Polyphony Theory*

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**Abstract:** After the second world war, the Japanese literary world ushered in the birth of "As A Person" magazine in the 1960s. Takahashi Kazumi is one of the most famous writers assembled around the magazine. Takahashi Kazumi has multiple thoughts on law and power in his masterpiece The Vessel of Sorrow. The polyphonic presentation of the novel eliminates the single perspective of the protagonist as the observed subject or the observed object, so that the work presents a deeper connotation. This paper interprets the work through the theory of "polyphonic", and analyzes the author's multiple thoughts on law and power, authority, ideal and reality contained in The Vessel of Sorrow.

## 1. Introduction

The Vessel of Sorrow is one of the most famous works of Takahashi Kazumi, and it is also the one that makes Takahashi famous. It won the first "Literary Award" of Kawade publishing house press in 1962. The main character of the work is the 55-year-old jurist Masaki Tennzenn, and it takes the form of a "script", which is the first person to call the narrative subject. Masaki Tennzenn's wife Shizue can only be in a room at home because throat cancer, Masaki Tennzenn's brother introduced the employment of domestic woman Komeyama Miki. Soon after, Masaki and Miki develop a physical relationship that continues after his wife's death. And let seemingly calm life set off waves, is when Masaki met the daughter of Dr. Kuritani Bunnzou, Kiyoko. Masaki had originally hoped that Kiyoko can marry his eldest son, but in many meetings with Kiyoko, he was gradually attracted by the charm of Kiyoko, finally reached a marriage contract. An enraged Komeyama Miki takes Masaki to court, demanding damages for his wrongful act. This fact was even published as a newspaper story, causing a great response. In order to prove his innocence, Masaki quickly sued Komeyama Miki for defamation. He argued that their relationship was conducted with their "mutual consent", so it did not constitute wrongdoing. On the contrary, his public standing was greatly damaged. Masaki confident about this, but the criticism is coming from all directions, especially his little brother's impeachment lets him into a collapse.

From the preliminary research, it can be seen that critics have affirmed the significance of the existence of the work itself, but there are still some unresolved problems. First, some critics are confused about the expression of the article and the narration of the first perspective. Secondly, it seems that the commentary is not enough to combine the image of Masaki with the social background, and there are some deviations in the excavation of the theme. There are still many problems to be

solved in the previous reviews, whether from the writing technique of the article itself or the writer's creation intention. The thinking of the times contained in the article is multi-level and multi-directional. This paper will explore the ideological treasure in the article as much as possible through more methods.

## 2. The Role and "Polyphonic" of Masaki

At the time of winning the prize, this work was questioned to a certain extent, and then it was constantly discussed. Among them, one problem has been attracting much attention. Takahashi Kazumi had just turned 31 when the work was completed, and the protagonist was a 55-year-old legal authority. Why does someone so young and debutante choose to write from the perspective of an old man?

The protagonist Masaki Tennzenn is a figure of breathtaking rationality. "For me, the concept of love is nothing more than a superfluous emotion, like sin, and it is wise to avoid it if you can avoid it."<sup>[1]</sup> His life revolved around learning, and any emotion other than learning seemed to him useless and therefore excluded. The same is true with colleagues and friends. "I was cold when my wife was ill," and "I adhered to the principle of keeping light contact with my friends. That is why I had no one I could trust when I was in trouble"<sup>[1]</sup>. Such an absolute rational person who only knows knowledge but has almost no feelings, no friends and no intimate relationship makes readers feel offended, and some critics also think the character of the protagonist is not real enough.

The story can be roughly divided into four time periods. The narration of the four times and Spaces is not arranged according to time, but staggered. The interlacing of the four times and Spaces also allows the protagonist to talk with his former enemies, his relatives and friends, and himself across time and space, and to think about the past, reality and future through a large number of continuous dialogues.

It can be seen that what the author pays attention to the hero is always the hero's thought, and the hero can also think independently of the author. "What matters is not what the hero is in the world, but first and foremost what the world is in the hero's mind, what he is in his mind."<sup>[2]</sup> At the same time, the questions the hero thinks about are sometimes what the author wants to tell the reader through him, and sometimes they are established separately. A unique relationship is formed between the author and the protagonist, that is, between the creator and the creation. The creator creates the protagonist, tries to seek and realize the conscious consciousness of the creation and establishes his subjectivity. There is a relationship between creator and creation, and the relationship between creator and creation is just like Bakhtin's assessment of Dostoevsky:

Dostoevsky, like Goethe's Prometheus, did not create silent slaves (as Zeus did), but free men; The free man is able to stand with his creator, to disagree with him, even to rebel against him.<sup>[2]</sup>

It can be said that in "The Vessel of Sorrow", Masaki Tennzenn, the protagonist, is both from the author and independent of the author. He is a self-conscious individual who grows up independently. Sometimes the author is the subject of the confession, sometimes he will become a calm spectator, and in other cases he will become other characters to discuss or even argue with the protagonist. Takahashi Kazumi took the trouble to let Masaki Tennzenn to carry out self-dialogue, and argue with others, large sections of psychological description and dialogue description constitute the main content of the work, so there are a lot of independent, clear and not mixed voice in the work, constitute the "multi-voice" effect, that is, "polyphonic" effect.

Polyphony was a concept proposed by Bakhtin when he examined Dostoyevsky's novels. Although he proposed such a concept, he did not give any strict definition of polyphony. He called Dostoyevsky's novels "polyphonic novels" and emphasized that the important feature of Dostoyevsky's novels is the dialogue relationship between the author and the protagonist, as well as

the protagonist and others, and the phenomenon of "multi-voice" formed by the dialogue relationship. Bakhtin believes that Dostoevsky's novels create a kind of equal dialogue and communication between the author (self) and the protagonist (the other), so that the polyphonic form of multi-voice and double-voice is formed between different subjects. In the polyphonic novel, Bakhtin found that Dostoevsky had created a whole new relationship between subjects, one that spoke to each other, complemented each other, and co-existed at the same time. Most of the characters in Dostoevsky's works are individuals who express their opinions, so his works are full of different voices. Continuous discourse communication with others enables the protagonist to keep thinking and growing, and at the same time to construct a new self. Of course, this construction is not a single cycle that is completely closed, but is constantly growing and unfinished, forming a growth ring that cannot be closed. Considering that Takahashi Kazumi also read Dostoevsky extensively and was influenced by Dostoevsky to some extent, it is not surprising that he used the form of "dialogue" extensively in *The Vessel of Sorrow* to express his multi-layered and multi-angle thinking in a specific historical period.

Bakhtin believes that the dialogs of Dostoevsky polyphonic novels can be divided into two forms, one is "large dialogue" and the other is "micro dialogue". Bakhtin said of the large dialogue: "All the relations between the parts and elements of the novel, both inside and outside, are dialogic to him; He frames the novel as a 'large dialogue'."<sup>[2]</sup> Micro-dialogue is mainly reflected in the psychological structure of the characters, and its form is the monologue of the characters.<sup>[3]</sup> Of course, micro-dialogue involves more than just character monologues. "Large dialogue", can be an echo or opposition of the plot structure, while the essence of "micro dialogue" is "the confrontation and interlacing of two kinds of consciousness, two kinds of opinions and two kinds of evaluation in every component of one consciousness and language". This kind of confrontation and interlacing includes various relations of "for or against, affirmation or supplement, question and answer", including monologues and between characters. On this basis, this paper analyzes the "large dialogue" and "micro dialogue" in *"The Vessel of Sorrow"*, and makes a deep and multi-angle interpretation of the writer's thoughts.

## 2.1 Large Dialogue -- about turning

"Thought, I am afraid, needs human blood more as a sacrifice than love, than loyalty to the Lord. He who is devoted to an idea dies best before he betrays it."<sup>[1]</sup> Ogino chose to sacrifice in order to adhere to his communist ideal, so his thoughts are not easily changed by a piece of soft prose, and the transformation and suppression of thoughts are futile in a sense. Since ideas cannot be punished, it makes no sense to use law to control people's thoughts and force communists to abandon their ideals. The turning was a formality, but the communist mind could not be solved by repression.

Takahashi puts forward a theory of "conviction crime" through Masaki. This theory is also the key to the understanding of the whole text, because Masaki became a legal authority through this theory. Masaki tried his best to establish the theory of "conviction crime", which means that since ideological prisoners and political prisoners, as free people, consciously maintain "conviction" of the future society and ideal society, they are clear about the illegality of their actions and fully understand the consequences caused by their actions. It is impossible, in fact impossible, to correct, educate, or educate such an action with sufficient "conviction". When the "protective law" is applied, it is impossible to punish them. In addition to explaining the conviction theory, the article also emphasizes that in the past, the law had always considered that they had to be put in prison because they held certain thoughts, so they were dangerous thought carriers and should be isolated and corrected by the society. It should be noted, however, that a conviction offender is neither a personality disorder nor a hangover. Since they were guilty of conviction, their actions were intentional rather than negligent.

Forcing them to tell "I'm wrong" has lost the meaning of restraint itself and has no effect at all. Neither arresting them beforehand nor making them talk about "turning" after they have been arrested can actually change their beliefs, and punishment becomes meaningless. Ogino is a case in point. He sticks to his beliefs and does not lose his temper in the face of danger. Even if he finally "turns" in order to survive, it is only a temporary verbal act. After returning to his hometown, he still insisted on his own ideals and beliefs, and still criticized society under the guidance of communist theory. According to the theory of "conviction crime", the punishment of Ogino is impossible, and it is impossible to have any effect.

There has been a special trend for Japanese left-wing writers to "turning literature" since before the war. In 1933, communist party leader Sano Manabu and others declared their renunciation of communism in prison. After that, a large number of left-wing writers and thinkers were forced to make statements of conversion. After turning, these writers fully look into their own hearts and write down their troubles as intellectuals in the form of private novels. This is known as "turning literature". In left-wing writer for thinking to write novels, the tradition of private novel influence deeply, many writers are characters through inner struggle and pain to describe their inner bitterness, on the steering and inner scars and nothingness, or is the envy of love, not to the writer's or the ambivalence of communist ideology. However, this kind of literary creation about turning is only gazing at one's own heart, without reflection on the process of turning, let alone the prospect of the ideological tendency that may be developed in the future. It is basically confined in a relatively small ideological space. From this point of view, Takahashi Kazumi's thoughts on turning and literary creation of turning are far beyond the "turning literature" tradition of the private novel system in both depth and breadth. Through the setting of two lines, he made a dialogue between a nominal steering and a real steering, and had more layers of thinking about steering. And more importantly, it cannot have satisfied

Takahashi Kazumi and already thinking on this issue, through his "convinced crime theory" put forward more practical step, points out that the thought of crime is more deterministic and modification, passed a law to punish crime, and try to make them to transform thought is very stupid. Of course, Takahashi Kazumi proposed such a legal theory, ironically, the Japanese government through the enactment of various laws to suppress all kinds of left-wing ideas including communism, rather than "turning literature," which simply describes the ideological struggle, is more action and belligerence, a solid step forward.

## 2.2. Micro dialogue

If the "large dialogue" in polyphonic novels is mainly the protagonist's structural dialogue, then the "micro dialogue" is embodied in the specific monologues and dialogues. In *The Vessel of Sorrow*, the micro dialogue is mainly reflected in the inner monologue of the protagonist and the dialogue with others. Some of these monologues and dialogues form a relationship of struggle and confrontation, while others form a relationship that emphasizes sexual response.

### 2.2.1. About Communism

As mentioned above, the work itself is based on real news events. It was this news that inspired Takahashi Kazumi to write *The Vessel of Sorrow*. About this incident, there is a more detailed record in *The Commentary of Takahashi Kazumi* by Kawanishi Masaaki.

Takahashi made changes to the two details of the original news, one is the object of remarriage Kuritani Kiyoko, a domestic woman identity Komeyama Miki. Compared with the original news, Kuritani Kiyoko is young and beautiful, but also with a pure aura, it seems that there is no cannibal fireworks, and Masaki "fantasy" linked together; And homemaker Komeyama is living with Masaki every day together, with the life of Masaki is full of fireworks gas of firewood, rice, oil and salt, is

also the most close to the life of Masaki. These two changes highlight the gap between ideal and reality. Wakisaka Mitsuru analyzes and interprets Masaki's feelings towards the housekeeper and Kuritani Kiyoko, saying that one side is cruel and the other side is dreamy.<sup>[4]</sup> He kept Komeyama and Kuritani in his mind and kept weighing them, constantly talking to himself, constantly overturning what he thought in one moment by what he thought behind him. He is constantly fighting in his heart, hesitating between reality and ideal, and this form of inner monologue is the expression of micro dialogue.

The pursuit of 55-year-old Masaki for 28-year-old Kuritani has always had an air of dreaminess that seems far-fetched and unnatural. On the surface, the author is writing fantastical love, but in fact, through the illusory nature of the dreamlike feelings and utopian vision to describe the heart can transcend the reality of the ideal yearning. What did Takahashi Kazumi say about the ideal beyond reality? In a conversation with Kaiduka Shigeaki, he talked about his pursuit of ideals at the national and beyond level, saying, "When I was a student, I wanted to learn some ideas beyond the national level, so I learned Marxism."<sup>[5]</sup> Marxism has brought the ideal beyond the existing reality to the students, as well as the ideal of socialism. For Takahashi, this utopia beyond the reality is the socialist society or even the communist society. This point, from Takahashi's application for party membership to the Kyoto University Communist cell organization, it can be seen that Takahashi had a vision of communism in his student days. But the reality hit him again and again, reminding him that in fact, such an illusion is unrealistic. Just as Masaki constantly premonition of their feelings and Kuritani Kiyoko is no way out. Masaki's wavering of longing but not expecting actually implies writer Takahashi's hesitancy towards the uncertainty of ideal.

I kept delighted at being so close to Kuritani Kiyoko, but kept telling "myself" how dangerous it was. Kuritani Kiyoko opened a door to utopia for me, giving me a pleasant glimpse of my dream world, but the reality was sobering. "I" saw the ideal world, but then pulled "myself" back to reality. "I" showed the distance between ideal and reality through continuous dialogue with "myself".

Takahashi Kazumi added a lot of inner monologues to the emotional lines of the protagonist Masaki Tennzenn, constantly between Komeyama and Kuritani undecided, but highlights is the thinking of the uncertainty of reality and ideal, coupled with the author's own experience is clear is that he himself in Japan the contradiction between reality and ideal of communism, And finally the inadequacy of the realization of socialism in Japan.

### 2.2.2. Law and power

If a soliloquy in which the protagonist Masaki's constantly wavering is a kind of micro dialogue, then there's another form of micro dialogue in the work, that is the protagonist after continuing dialogue and dialogue with others in the heart again and again to confirm or refute, attach this form directly or opposing emphasized the protagonist's thoughts. Masaki Tennzenn's body has two symbols, one is law, the other is power. There are a lot of dialogues about law and power, and the relationship between law and power is discussed.

In many paragraphs, the relationship between law and power is constantly mentioned, repeated, and narrated by different people and from different points of view. But with each passing mouth, the criticism intensifies. Law and the corresponding relations of power, and the law when power is on a path to madness cannot have the effect of restraint, only this point of view of power to the point of no return flow between each narrating subject, and support each other, make the method with this proposition forms of power transmission, circulation, let the reader more feel heavy and trigger further thinking. In this narrative space, the narrative subject can be the protagonist himself, his friends, his students, or his relatives. The author just borrowed the identity of Masaki Tennzenn, the "legal authority", and sometimes became the protagonist himself, sometimes became his opposite, and sometimes became a bystander. The author draws on such a dialogue between people. The relationship

between the author and the hero, to break the limitations of the protagonist, subject/object, make the protagonist's behavior more freedom, the protagonist of the origin, let him free in the dialogue with him, cause a lot of problems, make the text with the connotation of more rich, also reflected the author for the social problems of extensive and deep thinking, Especially the critique of law and power. This kind of open discussion can also explain the author's thinking about the times when the times are changing.

The mirror appears many times in Masaki Tennzenn's home as special props, it was first a precious thing to Masaki's wife who has died, and also is the incarnation of the heart demons of the Komeyama who was in crazy state. In combination with the mirror as the symbolic role of law, the author seems to satirize Japan's pre-war and post-war power laws through such a hint. If the pre-war "legal hell" was a kind of dying struggle of power, the post-war powerful government's crazy suppression of various opposition groups just wanted to strengthen the position of power of the ruling class and obtain social recognition of this almost distorted power. The mirror reflects his wife's sickness, and the mirror was his wife's last bit of expectation; Komeyama Miki's madness reflected in the mirror is a kind of paranoia that she wants to gain status and recognition. Both reflect the ugly state of the Japanese government in the pre-war and early post-war period using law to maintain absolute power. No matter it is sick or crazy, it is the same in essence. This is actually a criticism of the author that the power has gone crazy before and after the war.

### 3. Conclusion

The presentation of polyphony eliminates the single perspective of the protagonist as the observed subject or the observed object, which makes the work present a deeper connotation and shows the author's deep thinking on various realistic problems. Takahashi Kazumi thought deeply about law and power, authority, ideal and reality, individuals and times, etc. His criticism of the society was multi-faceted and powerful, and his concern for the society was very detailed. The polyphonic narrative form contains a large number of dialogue forms, in which the large dialogue is the contrast and echo of the plot, while the micro dialogue is the inner monologue and the dialogue between the characters. The large dialogue in *The Vessel of Sorrow* emphasizes the importance of consciousness through the comparison of different forms of turning, and the writing of the theory of "conviction crime" undoubtedly confirms this kind of consciousness and thought crime. In fact, the hesitant soliloquy between the two lovers highlights the author's pursuit of ideals and helplessness to reality, revealing the author's inner longing for socialism and even communism, and his premonition that he cannot realize his ideals. The other narrative form, formed through the protagonist's continuous dialogue with others, emphasizes the corresponding relationship between law and power, and expresses the author's satire on the law and power that have gone on the road of distortion.

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