

## The keyword of Western literary theory from the perspective of cultural self-confidence: non-individuation

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### Abstract:

The theory of "impersonal" poetics was put forward by the British modernist poets and had a great influence on the creation of Western poetry in the 20th century. Eliot can be said to be the pioneer of Western critical theory, among which the "impersonal" theory has played a key role in the development of literature. In this regard, this paper will take the theory of "non-individuation" as an example, incorporate it into the context of ideological history, and regard the theory of "non-individuation" as the theory of poetic self-discipline from the perspective of creation. This theory gives a new literary meaning to the concept of "non-individuation". The dialogue object is not only the romantic poetry theory, but also the individualistic poets. In this regard, this paper first introduces the connotation of the "impersonal" theory, and analyzes the "impersonal" and individualism from the perspective of cultural self-confidence. Then, the dialectical relationship between tradition and historical consciousness is compared, and the depth of influence of "non-individuation" can be understood through analysis. Finally, the author compares the "impersonal" theory with the traditional Chinese poetics.

**Key words:** Non-personalization; Individualism; Cultural confidence; Poetry theory; Historical consciousness

### Introduction:

Eliot is a famous modernist poet in Britain. In the 20th century, Eliot played a key role in the modernist movement in the West, and some people even called it "the Age of Eliot". The 19th century to the 20th century is the key period for the traditional historiography to turn to modernist poetics. Eliot accomplished this feat and was called the father of modernist poetry by many Western poets. Eliot is not only a poet, but also a critic; his work "The Holy Forest" is known as the most famous Western critical work in the 20th century (Alhusami, 2017). In the article "Tradition and Individual Talent", published in 1919, the "impersonal" theory was fully expressed. Not only believes that the "individual" in creation is less influenced by traditional

concepts, but it also analyses the concept of "inheriting" tradition and "learning" tradition, and regards the learned tradition as "The Historical Sense", which subverts the traditional concept of poetry creation. It also holds that the relationship between individuality and tradition is interdependent. Later, Eliot found that the full use of existing culture is also very important; he believed that poetry is to make things new, rather than simply create new things, which is the core content of the "impersonal" theory of creation (Madrid Gil, 2023).

Many of Eliot's works supplement the theory of the "impersonal". Later, because of Eliot's more conservative political views, the relevant word "impersonal" is requisitioned. In his works, he said that it is necessary to re-establish personal and racial life links and oppose all struggles. Compared with the traditional concept, the "impersonal" theory pays more attention to the emotional problems of creation, for example, in the sentence "poetry is not to indulge feelings, but to escape feelings" (Global Views-Asian Studies. (2020). Studies from American University Describe New Findings in Asian Studies (The Question of Tradition between Eliot and Adunis).

It shows the dialectical relationship of "non-individuation" at the emotional level. However, there is also a contradiction in the dialectical relationship. Some scholars point out that there are some conflicts in the theory of "non-individuation" from the perspective of modern criticism, taking Tradition and Individual Talent as an example (Nsiri, 2018).

### 1. Overview of "impersonal" theory

As a representative of the modernist poets of the 20th century, Thomas Stearns Eliot created the "Age of Eliot". In his work Tradition and Individual Talent, he analyzed the theory of "non-individuation", mainly from two aspects: First, poetry should respect and obey tradition, and the evaluation of poets should also be analyzed from the perspective of tradition. Second, in the process of creating poetry, "personality" should be avoided as far as possible. For poets, it is necessary to look at problems from the perspective of history, and only in this way can they realize their values. In the works of Tradition and Individual Talent, the "impersonal" theory is analyzed from three aspects. First, the relationship between poets and tradition is clarified, because many writers in history regard tradition as creative experience, although the exterior is very complicated, the essence is not very different. For an artist, while making progress, it also means that he needs to make self-sacrifice, if he does not devote himself to the art, then it is impossible to complete the "impersonal" transformation. Second, Eliot believes that the poet's creative process can be

compared to a chemical experiment, and the poet's mind has a certain catalytic role, and it is a scientific and rational process, which constantly restructures his own creative experience, and literary works are relatively vague things, requiring readers to experience themselves. And each reader's experience is different. What Eliot wants to express is not that the poet cannot have individuality, but to suppress the expression of individuality as much as possible in the creation of his works. The works should not be too subjective, and it is best to achieve the realm of "no self" and fully demonstrate the meaning of the works themselves. What Eliot wants to express is not that the poet cannot have individuality, but to suppress the expression of individuality as much as possible in the creation of his works. The works should not be too subjective, and it is best to achieve the realm of "no self" and fully demonstrate the meaning of the works themselves. Third, Eliot's "objective counterpart" is mainly the poet's emotional adjustment; he believes that the subject is less than the object, individuation is less than the impersonal. What is shown in Hamlet is the determination of the way emotions are expressed (Kim, 2019). That is, objects, scenes, events, etc., have also been verified in practice. In many of his works, he also uses a lot of allusions, myths and so on, and creates through the method of stream of consciousness, which can form an organic whole. Take The Badlands, for example, van Eliot made full use of allusions to religious legends and mythic stories, and took the modern city of London as the realistic background, forming a sense of history and reality, and achieving the purpose of "synchronic" (Belle et al., 2024).

## **2. The dialectical relationship between "non-individuation" and individualism**

From the perspective of modernism and cultural self-confidence, individualism is closely related to total alienation, and many works in the 20th century show the borderline blurriness of "I" and "he". In the early 20th century, the urbanization and modernization of Western countries developed rapidly, forming the bureaucracy, and the theory of capitalism was formed. In this regard, many works attach great importance to the "impersonal" logic behind capitalism. Calvinism, as one of the famous ethical sects at that time, believed that the subject status of human beings was not paid attention to, and more attention was paid to the individualization of interests, and the individuality was weakened. In the social background of "deindividuation", tension has gradually become the core of social thought research. At that time, some scholars put forward that many modern people in metropolises are more rational and have no obvious fresh personality. In Modernism, the crux of the problem is the individual, that is, the independence and individuality in it, as opposed to the community life, which was promoted by Western society at the time. By the

beginning of the 20th century, many literary works used the "impersonal" theory, most of which were related to the development of urbanization and industrialization. Eliot's theory of "depersonalization" is not a new concept, but a process of transforming contemporary social criticism into theory. Taking *Tradition and Individual Talent* as an example, the relationship between the "impersonal" and the individual is not the opposite relationship in the traditional sense, but needs to reflect a broken line through the complex space, which is also proved in Eliot's works. In Eliot's novel *Eldrop and Apple Price*, the characters of Eldrop and Apple Price are shaped respectively. Taking *Tradition and Individual Talent* as an example, the relationship between the "impersonal" and the individual is not an antagonistic relationship in the traditional sense, but needs to reflect a broken line through the complex space, which is also proved in Eliot's works. In his novel *Eldrop and Apple Price*, the novelists who shaped Eldrop and Apple Price respectively show their literary purpose (Sawa, 2018).

Individualism emphasizes individuality, while "non-individuality" emphasises group nature. In the process of creating works, works are considered in history. In Eliot's doctoral thesis, from a philosophical point of view, there are many similarities with the famous Bradley epistemology, which takes the "finite center" as the core, and Eliot regards the "finite center" as the "perspective", that is, a person's life experience and personnel constitute the cognitive entity (Nsiri, 2020). It also explicitly mentions "deindividuation"; any artistic creator will integrate personality into the story plot or characters, but themselves ", deindividuation". It can be said that "non-individuation" distinguishes between the experiential self and the creative self, and finally forms the theory of imitation. Imagist poetry pays more attention to the objective world feeling, advocating that poets should not just summarize things, but analyze the individuality of things, and give readers a fresh feeling. The poetic theories about Imagism and "impersonal" are inspired by the "stretch" theory, which emphasizes the emphasis on experience and makes the individual throw himself into the "impersonal" reflective consciousness, giving people a sense of immediacy. As for Eliot's "impersonal theory", it will criticise the perceptual experience that swallows up the objective world, and will make the objective world separate from the expression of experience. Finally, on the question of "who is the first", there is also a clear difference between "non-individuation" and the Imagists. The "non-individuation" theory holds that although the objective world is very important, it cannot be regarded as a necessary condition for artistic creation, but pays more attention to the poet's transforming ability. Imagist poetics believes that "imitativeness" is the most important (Solomon, 2017).

### 3. The dialectical relationship between tradition and historical consciousness

As for the definition of "tradition", Western scholar Hills defined it, tradition is not only a single thing, but a lot of things, in the sense of implication, it is passed down from generation to generation and is still in use from a long time ago, including buildings, scenery, paintings, books, tools, culture, etc., which is not only the result of social development. It's more of a product of the outside world. Traditional things need to go through the baptism of the long river of history. Eliot believes that tradition is not a specific thing, but a description of a work. Eliot's use of the word "tradition" is rare. In the development of group society, freedom will be limited by some laws, so it is more appropriate to regard freedom as a kind of spirit, and spirit cannot be restricted by others. After the Renaissance, humanism and scientism broke through the traditional feudalism to a certain extent. At this time, some scholars put forward that art needs to describe human life more, and freedom is the basic condition, and all art comes from life. Many romantic poets put more emphasis on the natural revelation of poetry. Compared with ordinary people, poets are more sensitive to emotions and have a better understanding of human nature. This kind of romantic poet has a rich imagination, and "imagination" is the basic condition for the creation of works of art. There is no need to abide by any rules, and the works are more revealing of true feelings, especially in the creation of classical principles. Only by breaking the original rules can we break through the shackles of tradition and complete self-innovation (Kotesovska, 2024).

Historical consciousness and "tradition" are opposed in Tradition and Individual Talent, and individualism is more focused on "tradition", which is not history in a broad sense, but the collection of all creative attempts. The poet's creation cannot be separated from the guidance of "tradition", and the relationship between each other is interdependent. Specifically, individual creation needs to have some rationality in the existing sequence. It is a traditional concept under the theory of "non-individuation" and has a universal meaning. Eliot also pointed out many times in other works that "tradition" is not to consolidate the good work of others, but to open up completely. In his lecture Tradition and Poetic Practice, he also analyzed the importance of historical consciousness (Sumner, 2024). Tradition is important, but one cannot follow the tradition; need to have a wide range of reading to truly grasp the "tradition". In his youth, Eliot repeatedly appraised Kipling's works, and in his later years, he also resonated with him. Kipling is an Indian writer who is completely different from Western writers in his writing style and has his unique writing style. Eliot tacitly acquiescing to Kipling's lineage and reconstructing Kipling's native lineage as an adult through narrative means. Under the expectation of the classical era, the center

creates expectations for the periphery, which causes a misunderstanding of the historical process. Under the theory of "deindividuation" it is necessary to propose a culture bordering on essentialism, in other words, to get rid of individuality. Substituting blood identity and cultural identity helps to form cultural self-confidence. In this perspective, Williams argues that realism is an illusion that creates a vacuum outside of realism, enclosed in a "highly selective field," rejecting the rest as a form of spiritual consciousness, and ultimately causing the suspension of history. At the same time, the theory of "depersonalization" and tradition are homogeneous and single. For example, after the consensus is broken, there are multiple traditions. Based on the definition of traditional standards by "depersonalization", in terms of cultural background, they belong to works outside the tradition. Although Eliot did not condone the rupture between literature and reality, only the self-sufficiency concept of critics, it did have a certain degree of influence on Eliot's later works.

#### **4. The contrast between "non-individuation" and Chinese poetics**

Eliot's "impersonal" theory attaches great importance to objective things and advocates the absence of the subject. Chinese poetics also advocates the realm of "no self", both of which require poets to give up individuality when creating, but let objective things show more charm in their works, reduce the interference of poets' subjective consciousness on objective things, and give readers more imagination space. In Chinese philosophy, it is believed that "heaven and man are united", which has a great influence on Chinese scholars (Wang, 2021). Whether it is Plato, Hegel or Aristotle, they all attach great importance to the subject and thus determine the intention of the object. The traditional Chinese poetics believes that it is only a subjective idea produced by individuals; all things are not discernible, cannot be thought, cannot be expressed, and only rely on human subjective consciousness to produce a comprehensive understanding of things. Under such influence, the poet advocates "the state of no self". The subject occupies the imaginary place, the object occupies the real place, and only in this way can all things be presented (Tsamir, 2024).

The core content of Eliot's "non-individuation" theory is also that poets give up individuality. Eliot believes that poets need to weaken "self", to attach importance to objective things and attach importance to everything. The poet can see himself as a medium, and he needs to have a unified sensibility and achieve a unity of mind. As far as readers are concerned, they have been deeply influenced by Chinese traditional concepts, and many poets have left room for readers' imagination. For example, in the famous poem Ma Zhiyuan's "Tianjing Sand · Autumn Thought", the withered vines,

mice, dark crows, small Joe, running water, ancient roads, west wind, thin horses, and sunset are objective things; regardless of the distance, the reader can imagine themselves. Eliot hopes that readers can have a certain space for imagination in artistic works, among which *The Waste Land* is one of the representative works of "impersonal" poetry, which does not describe anyone's life and expression, showing the universal nature of human beings.

### Conclusion:

"Non-individuation" is an important force in poetics, which can balance individualism and romanticism, but the limitations of its concept also limit the application of this theory to a certain extent. However, many realist poets still regard "impersonal" as the main way of writing. In this theory, "tradition" comes first, and the relationship between life and history is rarely discussed. In addition, "tradition" is also the core content of many poets' creation, but the application of "tradition" is not the tradition of "tradition", and it is necessary to remind creators to make a breakthrough of themselves, control emotions in the new context, and poets need to give up their personality. This is similar to the state of "no self" in China, but it is only the tip of the iceberg of a large poetics theory, whether poets, critics or readers can understand poetics from a higher level, so that the real "me" is integrated into everything.

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