

# THE CATASTROPHE OF THE “CAT COUNTRY” OR DEGRADATION OF CULTURE

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## **Abstract**

*This article analyzes the works of the Chinese writer Lao She “Catcountry”. The author examines the factors that cause the degradation of Chinese culture and its figurative interpretation through a work of art. The novel satirically describes the current events in the city of cats. Lao She shows the negative circumstances in Chinese culture, spirituality, and enlightenment. The article says that the novel is also significant from a modern point of view.*

**Key words:** Culture, enlightenment, value, satire, artistic image, evil, lowness

## **Introduction**

Existentialism can be seen as a philosophical reflection of the dramatic nature of human existence in the twentieth century, which takes place between life and death, existence and non-existence. The urgency and social significance of the problems raised by existentialism ensured the widespread popularization of this philosophy and turned it into a certain “way of thinking” of a significant part of the creative intelligentsia of the second half of the twentieth century. The trend of existentialism, which focuses on the analysis of human existence, has become a leading style in twentieth-century literature, albeit formed in philosophy. Many works of art have been created in this direction. In particular, the Chinese writer Lao She's “Cat country” is created in the style of existentialism.

Lao She is one of the great writers of China and his works have been translated into English, Russian, Japanese, German and other languages and have earned a well-deserved recognition not only in his own country but also beyond its borders. The author's novels, plays and stories are read with interest by modern readers, attracting translators and researchers. The years 1937-1949 are marked by the development of new ideological and artistic images in Lao She's work. Published in 1933, *The Land of Cats* is a fantasy, but the author, who returned from abroad, describes the economic and socio-moral problems in China, the decline of Chinese culture and traditions. The main theme of the novel is the image of a rotten society with the negative impact of foreigners on Chinese culture, life, and the remnants of the past that do not leave the country, and it is shown that these vices are the cause of its decline.

At a time when free-thinking people could easily be imprisoned without trial, Lao could not speak directly. It was therefore necessary to give his works a humorous color to create a sharp satire on the Chinese reality of the 1930s. From the very beginning, the reader realizes that the events in the work did not take place in China. All the action takes place on Mars, where the narrator's flying plane crashes. The writer tries to hide the time and place of the action in the novel.

The work begins with the destruction of an interplanetary ship and is narrated by the protagonist. The protagonist, who flies to Mars, falls into the city of cats. From this moment the protagonist begins to get acquainted with the life of the city of cats. At three months, the cats learn the language. Of course, their language is not rich. “There are only 400-500 words. You can use them one way or another and say whatever you want.” [P. 8.33] You may think that a lack of words makes communication difficult. But the cats have found a way to do it, not to mention at all. You would think it would be harder to create in this language as the language of

cats is poor. A cat poem is created by putting 3-4 words in a row that mean nothing.

But not only language, culture, spirituality, science are also in the city of hungry cats. It all happened after some foreigner brought opium leaves, an opium tree, to the cat state. The play also says that the cat state has not always been in decline, it has an ancient culture with a high culture and civilization. The country was in a desperate situation with the arrival of foreigners and their opium tree. At first, the leaves of this tree were eaten only by the upper classes. But fifty years later, the opium tree has become a staple food for all residents of the cat state. With the arrival of the foreigners, they began to live a life of taralla bedod, the leaves of the tree causing idleness. Eating them stops the hands and feet of the population from moving. Thus, laziness and idleness arose in the state, and it began to disintegrate and collapse.

The opium tree is sucking for the city army. Opium leaves are so sweet, delicious and juicy that you can't control your thoughts after consuming it, but your hands and feet will stop working. Now imagine an army of cats whose opium leaf is the main sucker. The author's opinion on the matter is peculiar. "The weakness of the military has never led to a decline in international prestige," he said. The main reason is the loss of dignity and honor. No one wants to cooperate with such a state [p. 8.64].

The play depicts the country of cats in vain. The depiction of animals in fairy tales and legends is common in Chinese literature. Often animals interact with humans, protecting the borders of the world from the intrusion of dark forces, teaching wisdom, or guiding them. J. J. M. De Groot notes that "In Chinese folklore, the magical power is possessed by many animals: tigers, wolves, dogs, foxes, monkeys, cats, and so on. [P. 4.56]" But in this novel, Lao She's fantastic protagonists portray cats as carriers of negative socio-ethical qualities. The author points out that it is illogical for "cat people" to remember not only the past, but also the present and the future.

The image of the cat in the novel is interpreted as a cat-destroyer, a cat-devil, representing evil and death. No wonder Lao's main protagonists don't give the father and son cats the names Big Scorpion and Little Scorpion. The scorpion represents evil, death, destructive forces, disaster, darkness in Chinese culture. That is why the qualities of "big" and "small" reflect their power of evil, their "level of toxicity". Lao She shows that the Great Scorpion Poison is dangerous to the whole society, not just one person.

It can be said that Lao She does not explain but show the decline of civilization in the play. As the author points out, the author exposes the flaws of human society with a single blow in his best comic works and reveals its roots. In the play, the City of Cats is portrayed as a city that does not care about the lives of its inhabitants, a city of spiritual unity and solidarity. The work raises many questions for you, surprising. As the author points out, this satirical work should be written as vividly and interesting as it is poisonous, so that both laughter and tears appear. You don't laugh when you read the work, in some places you laugh, in other places you feel sad.

Put emotions in the cat community as if there is no need for the human mind either. In this city, the state does not interfere in the lives of its inhabitants, does not interfere, and laws are passed that do not require cats and humans to abide by these laws. The inhabitants of the city of cats live according to established principles, the most important of which is that everyone has dominion over others, owning his property. No one protects the population. Pogon cat-people are morally disruptive of society in the pursuit of their own desires, engaging in destruction rather than creation, only busy or preoccupied with preserving and protecting their property.

The Great Scorpion is depicted as the largest landowner in the country, a close friend of

the imperial court, and a tyrant whose compatriots tremble before him. Laws do not exist for him. He kills his soldier because he ate only one opium tree leaf. He sees nothing terrible in it, he does not understand the gravity of his crime. And the narrator of this story is very surprised at the grief of the soldier's death. After all, he takes a foreigner (narrator) to strengthen his power and elevate his authority, brings him closer to himself, and presents him to the citizens as a divine ambassador. He immediately agrees not to be left unprotected when he demands proper feeding of the soldiers working on his plantations and financial assistance to the family of the fallen soldier. The writer reveals in a humorous way the national essence of the aristocracy of the cat state, which is ready to kill its own people in order to obtain the right from the hands of the enemy in order to preserve all privileges. Even in the most tragic moments of the country's history, they do not care about its fate. Aware of the approaching enemy army, the emperor issued an order to move the capital into the country and allowed only those close to him - high-ranking officials, scholars - to go with him. It gives others the right to die for the honor, freedom, and independence of the Homeland. So the writer reveals the essence of "true" patriots. They must save their lives, and the homeland must be saved by those who live at their own expense and benefit them.

For the inhabitants of the cat state, it doesn't matter who rules them, whether they are zombies in the presence of the emperor or by foreign invaders. The policy of drunkenness corrupts the people to such an extent that many are completely indifferent to their fate. Little Scorpion, one of the country's youngsters, also says, "I've been abroad, I've seen the world, but you can only live among people who don't want to do anything, otherwise you can't live" [p. 8.123].

Using artistic forms, Lao She generalized the chaos in Chinese society on the example of the family and the state. This is shown by the relationship between the Big Scorpion and the Little Scorpion family. It mocks conservative-minded people who don't want to do anything through humorous methods, who aspire to the past, showing that they haven't even contributed to preserving the millennial cultural values of their people. This is illustrated by the example of the Monkey City Museum.

When the narrator goes to the Cat State Museum hoping for the future of this state, there, scholars and museum staff will tell visitors what they remember about the exhibits previously displayed in the halls. It doesn't matter to them whether or not these exhibits are there, for scientists the material benefit is important, they are immediately told the price of a particular exhibition. This pitching is directed against leaders who do not want to see and recognize the growth and success of other countries, who sacrifice everything to satisfy their own selfish nationalist interests. They have a heated argument over which one was the first scientist in the cat state. Scientists deal with useless conversations and problems that have nothing to do with science. All of the scientists' research has only one goal - to get their attention in order to get an extra leaf of the opium tree from a rich man. They serve individuals because there is no other work to be done. They are slaves at the disposal of the feudal-bourgeois elite and only care about how much they are paid. Using the example of the scientists of the cat state, the writer reveals the essence of a fake scientist who is indifferent to real science in the form of a grotesque. The narrator said, "Do you have any scientists?" to the question, "There is and there is so much. It is a sign of the innumerable number of scientists or the flourishing of culture, or the decline of it" [8.98.] says the Little Scorpion. Using the possibilities and aspects of literary language, the author reveals all the richness and charm of the language, both in the author's speech and dialogues, and in the narration of the narrator's language [6.8].

As you read the work, you will be convinced that this phenomenon can take place in any society where culture is in decline. Opium makes life, idleness a way of life. Interestingly, the opium leaves handcuff the feet, giving the human mind a running foot. For example, when the opium leaf took on the status of a state food, cats began to develop civilization faster than before. The opium leaf quenched the passion for physical labor, but allowed all the energy to be directed to spiritual activity. Poetry and art are developing rapidly. Of course, the rapid development of poetry in a language of 400-500 words is astonishing. But it depends on who looks at the development from which side. They introduced the phrase "precious belly" into the language of poetry, and poetry was enriched with such "cat inventions."

One of the most horrific scenes in the play is reflected in the brutal killing of teachers by their students. When the narrator asked for an explanation of this savagery and depravity, the Great Scorpion said of education, "We have not developed our own, we have not been able to assimilate others. Yes, I am hopeless and I think our nation is weak."

The situation of the protagonist (narrator) provokes the reader. It's hard to understand his purpose, he's a cat who wants to help people, but becomes a passive observer. The intoxicated does not want to consume the leaves and eventually consumes them anyway. The author also shows a hesitant person through this image. After all, everyone is required to accept the existing rules in society, to live according to established norms. So how does one behave in the face of life, death, freedom, loneliness, abstraction? Can he make the right decision, what are the consequences of his decisions? Problems and contradictions in human life are natural, because, firstly, not every decision is right, and secondly, in some cases, it deprives the decision-maker of himself. Avoiding such a responsibility can make life meaningless, abstract, as it may seem good to a person. The protagonist also begins to live according to the rules of the city of cats. "I felt like the psychology of cats was emerging; admits that my courage was increasingly giving way to flexibility [p. 8.55]. The work calls for vigilance, not to give up humanity in any case, to understand its place in society."

The Lao She novel is not just about fun, brainless people. There are also real heroes here, to whom the author gives the qualities worthy of a great nation. Great Goshawk have such features. The writer portrayed in this image the great patriot of his Homeland. "No, it is better to die of starvation than to eat the leaves of an opium tree," he says [p. 8.124].

With these words, the Great Goshawk denies the foreigners who have brought ruin to their country, and is also intolerant of actions that run counter to the interests of the homeland. He rejects old and foolish customs, such as carrying uncompromising, noble nobles into the past and the future. He understands the causes of decline and chaos. A patriot cares for the enlightenment of the people. The writer gave the Great Gorge many of the qualities peculiar to the people. Perseverance is described in harmony with the appearance of a strong will. He is tall, broad-shouldered, energetic. His spirituality, majesty, and physical vigor make the protagonist a romantic figure. Although his death did not change the fate of the homeland, it was a sacrifice.

Using the example of Goshawk, the writer shows that if a person does not agree with the ideology of the ruling class, he is immediately declared a criminal of the state and charged with the most heinous crimes. The criminal, Goshawk, is hiding in the mountains, but is not afraid to return to the capital of the cat state to give his life without fear when the threat to his homeland escalates. In the image of the vulture, Lao She portrayed, unfortunately, not many public defenders, reflecting the peculiarities of patriotic heroes who sacrificed themselves without fear in the cause of saving the Motherland. The writer was able to show the disobedient people in the struggle for the triumph of truth and justice in the example of Goshawk. Along with Lao Tzu,

who dreamed of educating the people and restoring human dignity, he also buried his ideals of reform.

The Chinese reality of the time did not allow these problems to be written and demonstrated openly. Fantastic, unusual address Lao Shega helped overcome censorship and publish the novel.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the reasons why the novel has not lost its significance to this day is that "Lao's work absorbs traditions of Chinese culture, attracts readers through folk art, soft humor, sharp satire, humiliation, negative attitude to human vices [1, p. 89]

Second, the satirical sharpness of criticism in Lao She's novel has not lost its relevance today, it calls for vigilance, calls for the preservation of national values, shows that both the culture and the state of a nation that does not preserve its values are in decline;

Third, Lao She's novels, plays, and stories show an entire period, the collapse of the old system under the influence of a socio-cultural phenomenon and the formation of a new way of life, with an emphasis on the importance of the human factor;

Fourth, Lao She shows through her works that the political significance of art, along with its aesthetic functions, contributes to the solution of socio-political problems.

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