What Maketh the Man?

Towards a Psychobiographical Study of Lin Yutang

Roslyn Joy Ricci

School of Social Science/Centre for Asian Studies
University of Adelaide

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Abstract

Dr Lin Yutang, philologist, philosopher, novelist and inventor was America’s most influential native informant on Chinese culture from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s. Theoretical analysis of Lin’s accomplishments is an ongoing focus of research on both sides of the North Pacific: this study suggests why he made particular choices and reacted in specific ways during his lifetime. Psychobiographical theory forms the framework for this research because it provides a structure for searching within texts to understand why Lin made choices that led to his lasting contribution to transcultural literature. It looks at foundational beliefs established in his childhood and youth, at why significant events in adulthood either reinforced or altered these and why some circumstances initiated new beliefs. Lin’s life is viewed through thematic lenses: foundational factors; scholarship and vocation; the influence of women; peer input; and religion, philosophy and humour. Most of his empirical life journey is already documented: this thesis suggests why he felt compelled to act and write as he did. In doing so, it offers possible scenarios of why Lin’s talents developed and why his life journey evolved in a particular manner, place and time. For example, it shows the way in which basic beliefs—formed during Lin’s childhood and youth and later specific events in adulthood—affected his life’s journey. It analyses how his exposure to the theories of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism affected his early childhood basic belief—Christianity—and argues that he accommodated traditional Chinese beliefs within Christianity. It suggests how women played a central role in influencing the specific directions of Lin’s life. This study shows how Lin’s writing, resulting from his beliefs and the themes and patterns evident throughout his life, is useful information for third millennium global societies. Acknowledging his basic beliefs and how significant events reinforced or changed the patterns built on these beliefs may aid educators in creating environments that enrich learning outcomes. This information shows how writing can inform readers and sway societal opinion and it confirms the importance of contact with nature in early childhood. Contact with nature cannot be underestimated in forming sound structures for concentration and emotional stability in later life. In suggesting why Lin took particular directions and not others, it is acknowledged that
although the circumstances of his birth, childhood and youth (which created his foundational beliefs) cannot be unerringly reproduced temporally or spatially, it is possible to recreate some of the significant events that stimulated this transcultural writer during his adult years. These include learning new languages and experiencing travel: events that can be reproduced to shape twenty first century learning environments.
Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Signed:

Roslyn Joy Ricci

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Abbreviations in Citations

Books by Lin Yutang


Other

OED for The Oxford English Dictionary

Websites


Note on Transliteration

Pinyin is used for the transliteration of Chinese names and terms except those used in direct quotes, book titles or authors and names widely known in other forms, such as Sun Yat-sen.