

# Fallen Souls in Turmoil: The Application and Transcendence of Psychoanalytic Theory in *Sinking*

Yajia Cao

East China Normal University, Shanghai 200062, China

10222740425@stu.ecnu.edu.cn

**Abstract.** Yu Dafu's short story collection *Sinking* is centered on psychoanalytic theory, innovating the autobiographical narrative form and psychological storytelling to depict the spiritual struggles of young intellectuals during the May Fourth period. This study applies Freud's theories to analyze the conflict between the id and the superego, hysteria as a defense mechanism caused by libido imbalance, and the deep-rooted causes of sexual repression, unveiling the unconscious turmoil of the protagonists. Yu Dafu situates individual psychological dilemmas within the context of colonial modernity, elevating pathological traits such as inferiority and self-destruction into symptomatic expressions of national trauma. The origins of his literary creation can be traced to personal experiences (childhood trauma, loneliness while studying abroad), influences from Japanese shishōsetsu (I-novels), and cultural anxieties induced by societal upheaval. The collection dissolves personal names and constructs symbolic figures, transcending the scope of psychoanalysis from individual diagnosis to social critique, transforming the existential plight of "superfluous men" into a universal predicament of intellectuals in a transitional era. By intertwining neurosis with national destiny and imbuing his poetic language with aesthetic redemption, Yu Dafu forges a critical pathway in the intersection of literature and psychoanalysis, pioneering a socio-symptomatic critique that reconstructs subjectivity and diagnoses the symptoms of his time.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalytic theory, Yu Dafu, *Sinking*, national trauma, neurosis in literature.

## 1. Introduction

In Yu Dafu's literary genealogy, the *Sinking Period* stands as a highly distinctive creative phase in the history of modern Chinese literature. While the exact temporal scope of this period remains a subject of academic debate, there is broad consensus that the publication of the short story collection *Sinking* marks its defining moment. This period is characterized by two groundbreaking innovations: first, the establishment of the *autobiographical* narrative as an aesthetic paradigm, and second, the modern expansion of psychological storytelling. Through the intertextual relationship among *Sinking*, *The Ashen Death*, and *Southward Migration*, Yu Dafu constructs a psychographic map of young intellectuals during the May Fourth era, transforming individual experiences into literary reflections of the broader societal malaise. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the protagonists of Yu Dafu's *sinking figures* exhibit heightened self-awareness and deeply pathological psychological traits, intertwining inferiority, self-pity, melancholic sensitivity, and youthful sexual anxiety. His precise depiction of neurosis enables his works to serve as literary experiments in the application of psychoanalytic theory.

## 2. Psychoanalytic Elements in *Sinking*

### 2.1. Neurosis and Psychosis: The Conflict of the Unconscious

The distinction between neurosis and psychosis serves as the foundation for analyzing the psychological characteristics of characters in Yu Dafu's novels. According to Freud's theory and the diagnostic criteria outlined in the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition), the unconscious plays a crucial role in differentiating these two conditions. Neurosis arises from unconscious conflicts, but individuals retain their ability to distinguish reality, whereas psychosis involves a loss of reality testing, often accompanied by hallucinations or delusions.

Freud posited that human psychological activity operates on three levels: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. The conscious mind consists of thoughts and emotions that individuals can directly perceive, which in *Sinking* manifests through the protagonist's expressions of sentiment. The preconscious consists of temporarily inaccessible but retrievable memories and knowledge, which can be recalled through focused attention. These preconscious elements are filtered to align with societal norms and personal moral values. For instance, in *Sinking*, the protagonist imagines himself as Zarathustra when encountering a farmer, internally repeating Zarathustra's words to the man. Similarly, in *Southward Migration*, the female character silently retreats to an empty room, overwhelmed by a surge of sorrowful memories that flood her mind like a spring tide.

The unconscious, in contrast, contains repressed psychological content that cannot directly enter consciousness. It comprises primitive impulses, instinctual desires, and suppressed childhood experiences that conflict with social norms. These unconscious elements persistently influence individual behavior and emotions through mechanisms that isolate them from conscious awareness. The preconscious, by contrast, acts as a reserve of socially acceptable content that maintains close ties to the conscious mind.

In Yu Dafu's *Sinking* collection, characters exhibit symptoms of neurosis driven by unconscious conflicts. For instance, in *Sinking*, the protagonist exhibits facial rigidity in the presence of a farmer, signaling emotional repression. In *The Ashen Death*, Y, after experiencing emotional trauma, engages in defensive avoidance behaviors. These examples illustrate profound disorder within the unconscious domain. Through a psychoanalytic lens, this study deconstructs the texts to reveal how neurosis functions as a tragic manifestation of self-dissolution in the struggle between cultural constraints and instinctual drives. The narrative strategy of pathologizing characters transforms neurosis into a symbolic system imbued with cultural critique, elevating individual psychological conflicts to a broader sociocultural discourse.

## 2.2. The Self and Society: The Conflict Between the Id and the Superego

Freud's structural model of personality is reflected in Yu Dafu's narratives through the inability of the self (ego) to mediate the repression and aggression imposed by the superego on the id. The characters in *Sinking* experience a dual bind between their instinctual impulses toward erotic objects and the moral prohibitions enforced by the superego, leaving the ego caught between the primary process-driven desires of the id and the reality principle of the superego. The protagonist's voyeuristic and masturbatory acts in *Sinking* exemplify the eruption of the id, while his subsequent self-reproach—"You should just die! How could you degrade yourself to such a level?"—demonstrates the suppressive power of the superego. This internal conflict materializes in the text as the existential dilemma of the "superfluous man": he longs to release his id-driven desires through sexual expression but remains bound by the superego's traditional moral restraints, ultimately leading to a fractured and deteriorating sense of self.

Freud identified several psychological defense mechanisms to mitigate anxiety and reconcile the id-superego conflict. Among these, repression, projection, and rationalization are the most commonly employed strategies by Yu Dafu's protagonists.

"Fortunately, there was the innkeeper's daughter to occupy his thoughts; otherwise, he truly would have had no choice but to commit suicide... Although he loved her deeply in his heart, whenever she brought him food or made his bed, he always put on an expression of complete indifference... Whenever she entered his room, he felt compelled to leave."

"He stammered out: 'Motherland, oh motherland! It is you who have caused my death!' 'Become rich, become strong!' 'You still have so many sons and daughters suffering!'"

"In truth, it was he who initiated this final rupture... After listing all the past grievances, he condemned his eldest brother as a villain and deemed himself a righteous man."

The protagonist in *Sinking* harbors affection for the innkeeper's daughter but is unable to confront his desires directly or express them appropriately. Instead, he resorts to avoidance as a means of repressing his urges, shielding himself from the psychological and physiological torment inflicted by

the superego when the id seeks release. His superego further externalizes this internal conflict through projective identification, constructing hostile images of others to mirror his own self-denial and repressed desires. His claim that the world's mediocrities torment him is, in essence, a transformation of his self-loathing into a persecutory fantasy projected onto the external world, forming a defensive posture of reaction formation. Similarly, his lament that "the motherland has harmed me" elevates his personal frustrations into a broader allegory of national trauma. This pathological translation from private id-driven desires to national suffering reveals a distorted psychic mechanism under colonial conditions—one in which the subject fabricates external adversaries to achieve self-redemption. Unable to express his repressed desires directly, he sublimates them into a grander moral narrative, transferring personal melancholia onto a larger symbolic object.

Rationalization is another common defense mechanism employed by Yu Dafu's protagonists to resolve internal conflicts. After severing ties with his elder brother, the protagonist meticulously enumerates his brother's faults while idealizing himself as innocent, enacting a dual process of devaluing the object and sanctifying the self. Through this rationalization, his transgressive desires (id) are restructured into a seemingly legitimate assertion of superego authority.

Examining these dynamics, it becomes evident that the behavioral logic of Yu Dafu's characters aligns closely with Freudian theory. Furthermore, the tension between the id, ego, and superego in his works extends beyond individual psychological struggles, intertwining with the broader allegory of national trauma, thereby elevating his narratives into an intersection of psychoanalysis and cultural critique.

### **2.3. Sexual Desire and Repression: The Conflict Between Vitality and Desire**

According to Freud's psychodynamic theory, libido functions as a fundamental psychic energy system that drives human psychological structure. In *Sinking*, the young protagonists exist within an extended Oedipal phase, wherein their reawakened instinctual desires after the latency period provoke intense internal turmoil. This stage of psychological development marks a transition from narcissistic libido investment to object-directed desire.

For instance, Y, while reading, frequently envisions a woman seducing him:

"Unconsciously, he would follow that slender hand, as if in a dream, and walk out. It was only when a warm, soft body sat in his lap that he realized he was no longer in the library.

Similarly, when Yi Ren is embraced by M,

"He felt a layer of feminine electricity subtly transmitting into his body. His self-restraint had vanished."

This state of libidinal disequilibrium manifests as a hysterical defense mechanism in the characters' transference practices. Their bodily symptoms reflect a blockage in the symbolic articulation of desire, as well as a traumatic excess of jouissance (real pleasure) in the real order.

Although Yu Dafu engages with Freudian discussions of the Oedipus complex, his approach differs in that he universalizes the concept beyond Freud's original formulation. Instead of confining Oedipal conflicts strictly to the phallic stage, Yu Dafu extends them across broader life experiences. Additionally, his protagonists exhibit a dual mechanism of projected hostility, further complicating the dynamics of repressed desire and psychological conflict.

## **3. Analyzing the Origins of Psychoanalytic Applications in *Sinking***

From the perspective of literary history, the *Sinking* period represents a triple breakthrough in modern Chinese literature. First, through the typification of the "superfluous man", Yu Dafu constructs a spiritual autobiography of May Fourth intellectuals. Second, his "exposure-style writing" shifts from moral critique to psychological dissection, pioneering an introspective narrative within modern Chinese fiction. Finally, situated at the intersection of Western modernism and Eastern lyrical tradition, Yu Dafu develops a psychological realism that reflects distinct national characteristics.

These literary innovations not only respond to the New Culture Movement's call for an in-depth exploration of human nature but also elevate individual pathology into a diagnostic framework for the era's spiritual malaise. Through this artistic transformation, Yu Dafu's work has profoundly influenced the portrayal of intellectuals in 20th-century Chinese literature.

### 3.1. Personal Experiences as a Foundation for Creative Expression

Yu Dafu's psychological disposition serves as a key lens for interpreting his literary works. His childhood trauma from losing his father, the emotional isolation he experienced while studying abroad, and his struggle with national identity as a citizen of a weakened China collectively shaped his melancholic and introspective personality. This psychological profile translates into a preference for depicting neurotic characters in his fiction. For instance, in *Southward Migration*, the pneumonia symptoms and emotional repression of Yi Ren and O can be traced to the author's own experiences with tuberculosis and personal emotional setbacks. Notably, although Yu Dafu never formally studied psychoanalysis, his ability to capture the unconscious motivations of his characters aligns closely with Freudian theories. The protagonist of *Sinking* exhibits voyeuristic tendencies that not only serve as a repressed libidinal release but also manifest anxieties of being the "gazed-upon" subject within a colonial context.

Furthermore, Yu Dafu's decision to abandon medicine for literature holds symbolic significance. His early Confucian education instilled both a desire to serve the nation and a romanticized literary sensibility. His patriotic sentiment, deeply influenced by Confucian ideals, is evident in his early poetry, such as his 1917 poem *Visiting Yue Fei's Tomb*, where he expresses his shared sorrow with historical figures like Yue Fei and Qu Yuan: "Our grievances shall last for eternity, just like yours." As a leading figure of the May Fourth generation, Yu Dafu's depressive tendencies heightened his ability to empathize with the collective sense of confusion and anxiety that pervaded intellectual circles at the time. The rise of social movements advocating personal liberation further enabled him to fully embrace and develop his extravagant yet self-deprecating literary persona. His medical training in Japan allowed him to observe human nature through a clinical lens, while his literary pursuits provided an outlet to alleviate his own psychological struggles. The intersection of these dual identities resulted in literary works that combine the precision of psychopathological description with a deep concern for human liberation.

### 3.2. Creative Principles and Influences

Yu Dafu's writing was deeply influenced by Japanese I-novels (私小说) and modernist narrative techniques. From 1918 to 1920, I-novels gained prominence in Japanese literary history as a distinct literary form. During his studies in Japan, Yu Dafu and his contemporaries were directly influenced by this literary movement, which led to the development of autobiographical fiction (自叙传小说) in China. This genre blended the introspective self-exposure characteristic of I-novels with the lyrical tradition of Chinese literati, thereby breaking away from the conventional plot-centered structure of traditional Chinese fiction.

In *Sinking*, Yu Dafu explicitly states that "all literary works are autobiographies of their authors", advocating for the use of personal experience as raw material for fiction. He believed that self-exposure was a means of expressing the existential despair of his era. The protagonist's childhood loss of a father and shifting educational trajectory closely parallel Yu Dafu's own life experiences. However, it is crucial to note that his autobiographical fiction is not a mere replication of Japanese I-novels. Unlike I-novels, which focus primarily on mundane personal experiences and psychological introspection, Yu Dafu infused his narratives with themes of national crisis and individual awakening. Additionally, his works employed modernist techniques such as internal focalization and stream-of-consciousness narration, creating a synthesis of realistic detail and artistic typification.

Yu Dafu's narrative approach was shaped by the three-tiered narration structure of Japanese I-novels, but he adapted and transcended the original framework by incorporating shifts in narrative perspective and temporal discontinuity. In *Southward Migration*, for instance, the third-person

internal perspective preserves the authenticity of individual experience while simultaneously introducing aesthetic distance, allowing private narratives to acquire universal significance. Through shifting narrative cores and restructuring narrative forms, Yu Dafu transformed the individualistic self-exposure of I-novels into an ethnographic representation, pioneering the lyrical autobiographical novel as a major form in modern Chinese literature.

### 3.3. The Influence of Sociopolitical Context

At the dawn of the 20th century, China was undergoing a dual crisis: the collapse of traditional Confucian ethics and the influx of Western cultural influences, which left intellectuals stranded in a spiritual wasteland. Yu Dafu vividly articulates this sentiment in *A Snowy Night*, where he reflects on his growing disillusionment during his time in Japan:

"It was in Japan that I first saw China's precarious position in global competition. It was in Japan that I first grasped the magnitude of modern science—not in abstract or metaphysical terms, but in its concrete reality. It was in Japan that I first realized China's fate and the humiliation that 450 million compatriots would have to endure. The deepest and most unbearable pain, however, came at the moment when I was struck by Cupid's arrow—when I fell in love."

Yu Dafu's neurotic portrayals are not merely personal psychological expressions; rather, they serve as literary reflections of the sociocultural anxieties of the May Fourth era. In *Sinking*, the protagonist's sexual frustration is not simply an individual repression of desire—it is the result of the collision between Confucian morality and colonial modernity. The entanglement of sexual repression and national humiliation reveals how colonial modernity exerts psychological oppression on the individual subject. Similarly, in *Southward Migration*, Yi Ren's pneumonia is not only a physical illness but also a metaphor for cultural identity anxiety.

Cultural contradictions, such as the opposition between indulgence and asceticism, provided fertile ground for neurotic conflicts. Yu Dafu literalizes these psychoanalytic theories through literary language: the protagonist's voyeurism in *Sinking* is not just a manifestation of repressed sexual desire, but also a response to the ideological clash between Confucian abstinence and Western individualism. Through his meticulous psychological descriptions, Yu Dafu not only captures the inner struggles of intellectuals but also unveils the pathological symptoms of an era in crisis.

## 4. Refining and Expanding Psychoanalytic Theory in *Sinking*

### 4.1. From Individual Impulses to National Crisis

Yu Dafu reconfigures Freudian theory through an Eastern poetic lens, extending its application beyond individual psychodynamics to encompass broader socio-historical concerns. Rather than confining psychoanalysis to libidinal repression, he integrates neurotic symptoms with the collective fate of the nation, projecting an era-wide neurosis onto the psychological screen of national consciousness. The protagonist of *Sinking* is not only a case study in sexual repression—exemplifying Freud's theory of "bed crime" (being imprisoned by his own desires)—but also a cultural martyr crucified by the humiliation of colonial subjugation.

When the protagonist enters a brothel, his facial muscles "twitch slightly"—a bodily manifestation of his erotic convulsions, which are in fact a double repression: both the moral superego suppressing the id and the colonial subject suffering under the scorching gaze of the West. Freud defined libido as the fundamental driving force of human behavior, but in Yu Dafu's writing, it transforms into a release valve for the national unconscious. When the protagonist, having succumbed to debauchery, ultimately walks toward the sea to commit suicide, his final internal monologue—"You still have many children suffering out there!"—explicitly links sexual failure and a bleak personal future with the broken destiny of the Chinese nation. This narrative strategy shifts psychoanalysis from the clinical realm of depression to the literary diagnosis of national psychological crises.

#### 4.2. From Oedipal Complex to Generalized Hostility

Yu Dafu creatively expands Freud's Oedipal complex, transforming it from a stage-specific phenomenon in early psychosexual development into a universal existential crisis. Traditional psychoanalysis confines the Oedipal complex to the phallic stage, where a child experiences an unconscious desire to replace the father and possess the mother. However, Yu Dafu reconfigures this concept through a dual-hostility projection mechanism—one that encompasses both external hostility toward others and self-directed hostility.

Within the narrative, the objects of resentment are no longer restricted to the familial sphere but instead diffuse into a broader network of antagonism. This hostility targets external others (e.g., the Japanese disciplinary system, Chinese intellectual peer groups, and unattainable love interests), yet simultaneously turns inward, consuming the protagonist himself. It is neither directed at a specific individual nor rooted in tangible conflicts but rather manifests as a symbolic representation of existential suffering. This dual-projection mechanism disrupts the linear relationship in psychoanalytic theory between instinctual drives and external conflicts.

A close reading of *Sinking* and *Southward Migration* reveals that Yu Dafu employs metonymic symbolism in constructing his protagonist's antagonistic worldview. The protagonist oscillates between political anxiety as a "weak citizen of a declining nation," fearful obsession with his love interests, and self-destructive tendencies stemming from feelings of incompleteness and inadequacy. These elements collectively form a literary representation of Heideggerian "thrownness", where the subject is cast into a world of inescapable existential tension. By transforming libidinal repression into a symptomatic narrative of cultural trauma, Yu Dafu expands the Oedipal complex beyond individual psychology into a metaphor for modernity's contradictions.

#### 4.3. From Individual Awakening to Collective Portraiture

As a pioneer in applying psychoanalytic writing to modern Chinese literature, Yu Dafu transcends earlier psychological fiction, which primarily focused on isolated portrayals of the individual unconscious. He shifts psychoanalysis from a case-by-case diagnosis to a collective social pathology.

The characters in *Sinking* are deliberately anonymized—"he" (他) in *Sinking*, "Yi Ren" (伊人, meaning "that person") in *Southward Migration*, and "Y-Jun" (Y君) in *The Silver-Grey Death* are non-specific signifiers rather than distinct individual identities. By constructing a floating system of symbolic signifiers, Yu Dafu erases proper names to transform his neurotic characters into cultural symptoms. The nameless protagonist of *Sinking* is not an individual but a mental projection of an entire generation of May Fourth intellectuals, signaling the fragmentation of identity and the erosion of self-certainty.

By transposing psychoanalysis from the private domain into the public sphere, Yu Dafu innovates a unique intellectual strategy for social critique. When the individual dissolves into a symbolic figure, his mental anguish ceases to be a mere clinical neurosis and instead represents a broader affliction shared by an entire class of intellectuals in a transitional era. This symptomatic reading reveals that beneath the surface layer of psychoanalytic discourse, Yu Dafu's works pulse with an urgent call for national enlightenment and redemption.

Yu Dafu reconfigures the epistemological function of psychoanalysis through his Confucian literati ethos, infusing it with a social mission beyond individual treatment. He uses lyrical expression to unveil the essence of the era and the collective psyche of a displaced intelligentsia, thereby transforming psychological realism into a vehicle for both national self-examination and cultural critique. In doing so, he elevates the "existential crisis" of intellectuals into a rallying call for broader socio-historical awareness, compelling marginalized individuals to confront their predicament.

This transformation—from personal pathology to public discourse—not only deepens the exploration of individual consciousness in modern Chinese fiction but also embodies the historical mission of the May Fourth intellectuals.

## 5. Insights into Modern Literature and Cultural Studies

### 5.1. The Recursion of Psychoanalysis and Literature

Yu Dafu's distinctiveness lies in his characterization, which, after absorbing Freudian theory, integrates theoretical insights with personal life observations and literary sensibilities, elevating his creative endeavors. Yu Dafu does not merely replicate Freud's repression model; instead, through a threefold narrative of "pathological behavior—psychological monologue—environmental oppression," he sublimates libido into a cultural metaphor—voyeurism is not merely a physiological release but also a subversive response of the colonized subject to the colonial gaze. The stance of his characters in the text unconsciously transcends Freudian theory, even reaching beyond the scope of contemporary psychoanalytic thought. To some extent, his works prefigure Karen Horney's later discourse on "basic anxiety" and "neurotic solutions," offering a compelling literary prototype: these psychological issues are not merely personal anxieties but symbolic of the spirit of the times.

As a later development in psychoanalytic theory, Horney challenged the classical psychoanalytic emphasis on "pansexualism" as a biological drive, arguing that sociocultural factors significantly influence human behavior. She liberated psychoanalysis from the constraints of biological determinism by incorporating a sociocultural dimension. The concepts of "basic anxiety" and "neurotic solutions" proposed in her *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* provide a theoretical lens for analyzing the psychological structures of Yu Dafu's characters. Horney asserts that basic anxiety arises from "the child's experience of isolation and helplessness in a hostile world," a theory that finds dual projection in *Sinking*: on the individual level, the protagonist's childhood trauma, such as losing his father at an early age, shapes his perception of the world as inherently malevolent; on the cultural level, as a Chinese student in Japan, racial discrimination intensifies his basic anxiety into national humiliation, reinforcing his early-life insecurities in a foreign environment. This cultivates what Horney describes as "generalized hostility"—a paradoxical defense mechanism that both longs for assimilation into Japanese society while enacting covert acts of revenge through voyeurism and masturbation. This conflicting defense mechanism of "love—aggression" precisely corroborates Horney's assertion that neurotic individuals simultaneously pursue contradictory goals. Voyeurism, masturbation, and alcoholism, all anxiety-driven compulsions, are not merely expressions of desire but also "neurotic solutions" for alleviating anxiety and resisting the colonial gaze. The protagonist's obsession with the opposite sex is intertwined with hostility toward himself, others, and society, a contradictory psychology of emotional dependence and enmity that aligns with Horney's later conceptualization of "neurotic conflict."

Ultimately, Yu Dafu's works demonstrate that neurotic personality and literary texts serve as signifiers of social conditions; neurosis ultimately transitions from a medical issue to a literary one. While the DSM-5 attempts to categorize human suffering through standardized terminology, literature functions as a diagnostic tool that transcends medical classification with its contradictions and poetic force. Literature not only reflects the manifestations of neurosis but also unveils its sociocultural roots. The portrayal of neurotic figures in literature, in turn, contributes to the future construction of neurosis theories.

### 5.2. The Aesthetic Redemption of Neurosis as a Literary Issue

Yu Dafu's depiction of neurosis is not merely an exploration of individual psychological dilemmas but also a creative attempt to transform pathological phenomena into aesthetic practice. The self-destructive behaviors of his "superfluous men," such as masturbation and alcoholism, on the surface, affirm Horney's concept of "neurotic solutions," yet through narrative, they are endowed with existential aesthetic significance—the protagonist's self-imposed exile becomes an act of resistance against an absurd reality, and his fractured soul is reconstructed in the literary mirror as an allegory of the spirit of the age. This redemptive mechanism manifests in two ways: first, neurosis is sublimated through art, shedding its pathological label and transforming into a symbolic tool for diagnosing cultural symptoms; second, the ambiguity and polysemy of literary language dissolve the

violence of medical diagnosis, providing a more inclusive interpretative space for subjective dilemmas.

Furthermore, Yu Dafu's work paves the way for a dual interpretative path of "pathology— aesthetics" in modern literature. Neurosis is no longer merely a pathological defect in need of correction but also a critical instrument that pierces through cultural façades, serving as an aesthetic experiment in reconstructing subjectivity. In the narrative of *Sinking*, the protagonist's monologue before his suicidal walk toward the sea welds individual death to national destiny, elevating personal suffering into a tragic ritual that awakens the collective consciousness. This aesthetic transformation not only echoes Horney's discourse on "cultural hostility" but also deconstructs psychoanalysis' biological determinism through lyrical narration, highlighting literature's critical function as a "social symptomatology." When neurosis is framed within the discourse of aesthetic redemption, it becomes a creative force for reconstructing subjectivity and interrogating the dilemmas of modernity—this is Yu Dafu's most profound contribution to modern literature: in the fissures between discipline and madness, literature poetically becomes an outlet for human psychological contradictions, bestowing fragmented souls of a broken era with a sense of wholeness.

## References

- [1] Xing, C. (2023). The Illusion of Depression: Re-examining the "Modernity" of *Sinking*. *Literary Review*, (06), 136-144.
- [2] Chen, Y. (2024). Between Shame and Desire: *Sinking* from a Postcolonial Psychoanalytic Perspective. *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature*, (03), 84-90.
- [3] Cheng, Y. (2016). The Expression of Psychological Dilemmas in Yu Dafu's Novels. *Literary Controversy*, (02), 154-160.
- [4] Zeng, P. (2011). Psychoanalysis and Moral China: A New Interpretation of Yu Dafu's Autobiographical Novels. *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature*, (05), 17-25.
- [5] Huang, X. (2010). Early Creation Society's Writings on Illness and the Construction of the Modern Individual. *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature Studies*, (03), 143-149.