

## **HUMANISTIC IDEAS OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN NOBEL LECTURES OF WRITERS OF RUSSIA AND ASIAN-OCEANIAN COUNTRIES**

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the Nobel lectures of I. Bunin, B. Pasternak, M. Sholokhov, A. Solzhenitsyn and I. Brodsky (Russia), and Kawabata Yasunari and Oe Kenzaburo (Japan), Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan (China). The text analysis is based on studying their assessment of the role of literature and the artist in society. It also researches individual works of writers, allowing correlating the publicistic and the artistic on a literary basis. The purpose of the article is to identify the humanistic content of the creative manifesto of the writers, its relevance in the spiritual

dialogue between Russia and the Asian-Oceanian countries.

**Keywords:** Russian literature, literature of the Asian-Oceanian countries, Nobel lecture, artist and society, humanism, comparative analysis, Ivan Bunin, Boris Pasternak, Mikhail Sholokhov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Iosif Brodsky, Kawabata Yasunari, Oe Kenzaburo, Gao Xingjian, Mo Yan..

### **1. Introduction**

Art strategies of literature studies at the turn of the 20th - 21st

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centuries make actual the expansion of the research space of the spiritual culture of the new Russia in its dialogue with the Asian-Oceanian countries. In respect of this aspect, works of a comparative nature are useful, for example, the reinterpretation of the publicistic material of writers of Russia and the Asian-Oceanian countries. The subject of the analysis was “The Nobel speech” by I.A. Bunin (1933), the poem “The Nobel Prize” by B.L. Pasternak, “The Nobel Lecture” (1959) by M.A. Sholokhov (1965), A.I. Solzhenitsyn (1970) and I.A. Brodsky (1987), the Nobel lectures by Kawabata Yasunari “Born by the beauty of Japan” (1968), by Oe Kenzaburo “I am a writer of ambivalent Japan” (1994), by Gao Xingjian “Humanity has more than history, it is also granted with literature” (2000), the Nobel lecture by Mo Yan (2012).

When choosing a future Nobel laureate, the committee members followed the will of Alfred Nobel: “...who created the most significant literary writing of an idealistic nature. My indispensable requirement is that, when awarding the prize, the nationality of applicants should not matter at all and

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the most worthy will receive it...” [2, 4].

Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin was the first Russian writer to be awarded the highest world prize. The committee emphasized the following in the assessment: “For the strict mastery with which he develops traditions of the Russian classical prose.” In 1958, the prize was awarded to another Russian writer Boris Leonidovich Pasternak, about whom the following was said in the committee decision: “For considerable achievements in modern lyric poetry, as well as for the continuation of traditions of the great Russian epic novel” [2, 7].

The creation of Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov and Aleksander Isayevich Solzhenitsyn was highly praised by the Nobel Committee “For the art power and integrity of the epic about the Don Cossacks at the crucial time for Russia”, “For the moral strength drawn from the tradition of the great Russian literature,” respectively. The last laureate of the prize in the 20th century from Russia was Iosif Brodsky, whose art achievements were summarized in the following words: “For the comprehensive creation imbued with a clear thought and poetic intensity” [2, p. 15].

The second half of the 20th century is distinguished by a deep interest in the literature of the Asian-Oceanian countries and names of their writers. Japanese writers Kawabata Yasunari and Oe Kenzaburo revealed the eastern world to the global reader, its traditions and culture in characters of their works. We should note that one of possible reasons for the award was the moral and ethical motivation to choose writers from the country that survived the atomic bombing at the end of World War II. The summary of the Nobel Committee emphasizes the national mindset: “For the authormanship, which expresses the essence of the Japanese mode of thinking with a great feeling” [2, p. 18]. And Oe Kenzaburo was awarded the prize "For the fact that with a poetic power he has created an imaginary world in which reality and myth, being combined, present a disturbing pattern of today's human adversities" [2, p. 19]. A number of Chinese writers, whose books reflected the past and present of the country, opened a new page of Nobel laureates. The characterization of Gao Xingjian's prose “For an oeuvre of universal validity, and linguistic ingenuity” sounds exhaustively. The

extraordinary creation of Mo Yan was adequately reflected in his assessment: “For the delusive realism with which the writer mixes a fairy tale, history and modernity”. It is obvious, that the key positions of the Testament of the prize founder, Alfred Nobel, dominate in the selection of writers and their art creed, namely the idealistic trend (humanism) of the art of writing, regardless of the artist nationality.

## 2. Methods

The problematics of the article is determined by a review of studies on the selected topic, which revealed the absence of a problem analysis of lectures of Nobel laureates in literature. Available works are of a bibliographic nature [8] or represent a local study of the speech of a particular writer [6; 10]. The correlation of the material of the lectures of the writers, chronologically delivered with a temporary difference, artistically diverse, is substantiated not only by the autobiographical drama of the writers' life, but also by the worldview with a significant understanding of the role of literature and the artist in society. The historical

and comparative method of studying the texts of Nobel lectures, which reflects the creative manifesto of writers, is promising.

### 3. Results And Discussion

The authors of the article take into account the cultural relevance of expanding the dialogue of literature between Russia and the Asian-Oceanian countries in the decisive situation of the 21st century. The literary correlation of texts of Nobel laureates allows us to identify the commonality of artistic positions in understanding the humanistic mission of literature as the main idea of the 20th century.

The problematic aspect of the article is the study of Nobel texts from the point of view of the Nobelists defining the role of the artist in society, the value of their works in the process of forming intellectual values of a person and moral and ethical principles of a personality. So, for example, A. Solzhenitsyn said straight and downright: “One word of truth will draw over the whole world” [2, p. 36]. Many years on, the Chinese writer, returning to the problem of the significance of the artistic word, determined that: “For the

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writer, the relationship between truth and literature is an ethical manifestation, literary ethics of the supreme dignity” [2, p. 97]. The “Good” and “Truth” of the Russian writers, the “Truth” of the Chinese artist and the “Humanism” of the Japanese proseman are synonymous for the reader and time. It should be noted that there is a certain uniqueness in the assessment of A. Solzhenitsyn, who, protesting against totalitarianism, clearly defines the place of an artist as a fighter. “Who will create a single framework for mankind - for atrocities and good deeds, for intolerant and tolerant, how are they distinguished today? Who will clarify to mankind what is really hard and unbearable, and what is only rubbing our skin nearby, and will direct anger towards what is more terrible and not towards what is closer? Who would be able to transfer this understanding over the limit of one’s own human experience? Who would be able to inspire a sluggish stubborn human being distant grief and joy, an understanding of the scope and delusions that he/she has never experienced? Propaganda, coercion, and scientific evidence have no power here. But, fortunately, there is such a tool in the world! This is art. This

is literature” [2, p. 28]. GaoXingjian, who emphasizes a specific connection of the author and the reader, takes a different position within the framework of the given topic: “Literature has nothing to do with politics and is solely the work of the writer as a personality. The writer does not stand as an orator of his/her people, he/she does not deserve worship. He/she is neither a criminal nor an enemy of people. ... However, such a human activity as literary creation, puts one inevitable requirement: the writer and the reader should meet of their own free will. Therefore, literature has no obligation to the populace” [2, p. 92-93]. The debatable nature of statements about the role of literature should mainly be seen in the national mentality of each of the laureates. In the position of M. Sholokhov and A. Solzhenitsyn, the high tradition of the Russian literature is alive, specified by L.N. Tolstoy as a “people’s thought,” uniting the character and the populace together. Oe Kenzaburo and Gao Xingjian choose the artist's path to hermitry.

The writers' opinions on the philosophical basis of creation are also contradictory. Gao Xingjian has an interesting interpretation of

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Confucianism, which is considered to be the basis of the Chinese culture in the world. The “physicophilosophical school” of Daoism is closer to him as a southerner. The philosophy of the Chinese writer, Gao Xingjian, is largely formed by the influence of European philosophers, including Nietzsche and Freud, as well as French existentialist writers, Sartre and Camus. As a student of the French department of the Beijing Foreign Studies University, Gao Xingjian was well acquainted with European literature. Accordingly, he looked for answers to complex questions about “being” as considered by Goethe in “Faust” and in novels by F.M. Dostoevsky, and he came to his own conclusion:

In his Nobel Prize speech the Chinese writer said: “Cold and objective literature is literature that is in exile in order to survive, that does not allow society to strangle itself and seeks to survive spiritually” [2, p. 93].

The comparison reveals the proximity of Gao Xingjian’s thoughts to the philosophical idea of V. Solovyov, as quoted by A. Solzhenitsyn in Stockholm “Being in chains we ourselves must complete the circle that the gods outlined

to us” [2, p. 25]. The desire for free speech unites emigrants Gao Xinjiang and A. Solzhenitsyn with the philosophical definition of V. Soloviev about the role of a true writer.

It should be noted that the path of the Russian writers to world recognition, which began for most of them during their emigration, was not easy. The symbolic recognition of I. A. Bunin established the “tradition” of the Swedish Academy’s recognition of exiled Russian authors. It is enough to refer to the biographies of A. Solzhenitsyn, I. Brodsky and Gao Xingjian. According to the Russian emigrant writer I. Bunin who perceives a free creative expression to be an important social act: “There should exist areas of complete independence in the world. Undoubtedly, around this table there are representatives of all kinds of opinions, all kinds of philosophical and religious beliefs. But there is something inviolable that unites all of us: the freedom of thought and conscience, which we owe to civilization. This freedom is especially necessary for the writer — it is a dogma for him/her, an axiom” [2, p. 7]. Because of well-known circumstances of that time, B.

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Pasternak’s failed speech is delivered in his poem “The Nobel Prize”, which expresses the poet’s faith in the triumph of the good over “meanness and malice” [2, p. 13].

Observations of the figurative system of works, the arrangement of the main and secondary characters, and the relationship between the author and the character lead to the conclusion that the classification of the character as a national image remains a priority in the development of characters for all writers. An analysis of an extract of Ivan Bunin’s story “Dark Alleys” about travelers (“A mud-covered tarantas with a half-raised top drove up, three fairly simple horses with tails tied because of slush. On the trestle of the tarantas there sat a strong man in a tightly belted drab peasant’s overcoat, serious and dark-faced, with a thin piceous beard, similar to an old robber, and in the tarantas there was a slender old military man in a large peak cap and in a gray greatcoat of the 19th century with a beaver stand-up collar, still black-browed but with white mustache, which was connected with the same whiskers” [2, p. 8]), referring to Pushkin’s reminiscences, testifies to the continuity of the tradition of Russian

classics in the works of the first Nobel Prize winner from Russia. Therefore, the prose of the nobleman I. Bunin was perceived as the final link in the literature of the 19th century [6].

The peasant woman from A. Solzhenitsyn's short story "Matrena's yard", righteous, common, kind, conscientious, honest, hardworking and patient as the whole nation, who endured all the hardships of the Russian history, is on a par with folk characters. The author was destined to become a link in the continuous movement of the great Russian literature from the classical "person of little mark" of N. Gogol, the "ordinary" one of A. Tvardovsky to the "common" one of the future Nobel Prize winner. The text of the novel "The Quiet Don" dramatically impleaches the life and fate of cossacks and Kozatstvo against the background of life-changing events of the century. The genre nature of a historical novel is transformed, being filled with epic content. The epic novel by M. Sholokhov, consisting of 4 volumes, concentrating on events in chronology, makes the Melekhov family the main character. The existence of all generations of the Melekhov family and their countrymen is chronologically

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connected with the cataclysms of the Russian society, such as the First World War, the February and October Revolutions, and the Civil War. The main character of the novel "The Quiet Don" Grigory Melekhov, happened to be between the two historical forces of the time, makes a moral choice, focusing on the values that he obtained in his family. At the end of the novel, the character refuses weapons, war and death in favor of life. "A strange indifference took possession of him! No, he would not lead the Cossacks under machine-gun fire. No reason. Neither cowardice, nor fear of death, nor aimless losses were leading him at that moment. Lately, he spared neither his life nor the life of the Cossacks entrusted to his command. And at the moment, it was as if something had broken ... He had never before felt all the worthlessness of what was happening, with such an utmost clarity.... He vaguely thought that he could not reconcile the Cossacks with the Bolsheviks, and he himself could not reconcile in his soul" [15, p. 442-443]. M. Sholokhov said at the presentation of the Nobel Prize: "Art has a powerful impact on the mind and heart of a man. ... My native people, on their historical

paths, did not go forward along a beaten track. ... I would like my books to help people become better, become purer in mind, wake love for people, the desire to actively fight for the ideals of humanism and human progress. If I have succeeded in it to some extent, I am happy” [2, p. 19]. The books of the Soviet writer Mikhail Sholokhov “The Quiet Don” and the Chinese proseman Mo Yan “Big Breasts, Wide Hips” show a wide epic panorama of the life of their people at a hinge period in the history of countries. The authors' personal involvement in the tragic events of the 20th century, world outlook principles formed a specific art world of novels, reflecting the creative manner of each of them. Moreover, aesthetic and moral assessments are determined by more than of half a century difference in the publication of works, having made significant allowance for the author's outlook on the past.

The poor childhood and youth of Mo Yan passed in a usual Chinese province, where his spiritual formation was greatly influenced by the verbal legendary of Chinese folk tellers. The little boy emotionally retold his mother legends about ancient heroes and

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magical transformations of foxes into beauties in his own interpretation. The name of the writer, Mo Yan, means “Don't Speak,” and explains the mother's anxiety for the future of the “talkative” son during the totalitarian rule. Over time, she freed him from Sunday's hard physical labor, let him go to the market to listen to storytellers, having believed in his unschooled talent as a narrator. In his Nobel lecture, he confessionally emphasized: “I am a storyteller. By telling stories, I earned a Nobel Prize in literature. Many interesting stories had happened to me before I got this award, and they convinced me that truth and justice triumph. Therefore, I will continue to tell my stories in the future” [2, p. 112].

The thesis of A. Solzhenitsyn on the purpose of literature to preserve the national soul is important: “So it becomes a living memory of the nation. So it smolders in itself and keeps its lost history - in a form that is not amenable to distortion and slander ...” [2, p.29]. The writer is totally against leveling the nation as a modern trend of the world community: “Nations are the wealth of mankind, these are its generalized personalities; the smallest of them



carries its own special colors, holds a special facet of God's purpose" [2, p. 29]. The statement of the Russian writer "We will not trample the artist's rights to express solely his/her own feelings and self-observations, neglecting everything that is being done in the rest of the world" [2, p. 30]. The idea logically continues in the speech of Gao Xingjian: "If the writer does not become the mouthpiece of people and does not act as an embodiment of justice, then his/her voice, of course, is weak. However, it is the individual's voice that comes closest to the truth. This is exactly what I would like to say here: literature is just the voice of an individual, and it has always been that way" [2, p. 87].

The author's formulations about the "voice of an individual" and "the right to express solely his/her own feelings", in our opinion, are synonymous in terms of expressing the freedom of an individual. One can include the original judgments of Iosif Brodsky in the conventional discussion about the freedom of speech: "If art teaches something (and the artist, first of all), then it teaches a particular human existence. Being the most ancient and matter-of-fact form of a private

enterprise, it voluntarily or involuntarily encourages in a person precisely his/her sense of individuality, uniqueness, and singularity transforming him/her from a public animal into a personality" [2, p. 40]. Thoughts of the Nobel laureates about the role of art in spiritual life are logical and consistent. Oe Kenzaburo, who has experienced the humanistic influence of the Western literature and the Japanese scientist Watanabe, sees his duty as a novelist in that those who express themselves through words and their readers would be able to cope with their own anguishes and adversities of their time and heal their souls from serious wounds. Assumptions, that for all the laureates the aspiration to preserve the life-creating energy of literature is unifying, are functional.

In the poetics of the work, semantic definitions of names are ambiguous. Gao Xingjian's story "On the Other Bank of the River", which reveals the type of a hero characteristic of the traditional Chinese literature, when a person being disappointed with reality goes into nature, is noteworthy. The hero is a peculiar symbol of the victory of Daoism over Confucianism. The heroes of the Russian and Chinese

writers, being incomparable with each other at first glance, are on a par with the “righteous” who preach the value of plain living, the power of sincere feelings, and humanistic ideals. The metaphor of the water in the titles of the novels by M. Sholokhov “The Quiet Don” and Oe Kenzaburo “The Flood Invades My Spirit” is significant, dating back to the genesis flood, its tragic role in the history of mankind. While the love for the mother positions the idea of Mo Yan’s novel “Big Breasts, Wide Hips”, symbolizes the woman’s original role embodied in the figurine known as “paleolithic Venus”, and the semantic definition of the surname of the main character of the novel “Doctor Zhivago” by B. Pasternak is the key one in the concept of “Life”.

In the interdisciplinary content, the environmental theme is especially important, which makes it possible to identify the role of natural images associated with humanistic ideas in the artistic and aesthetic searches of the writers. Kawabata Yasunari’s reasoning about the significance of natural symbols for every Japanese is interesting: “The words “snow, moon, flowers” - about the beauty of the successive four seasons -

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according to the Japanese tradition, personify beauty in general: of mountains, rivers, grass, trees, infinite natural phenomena and the beauty of human feelings” [2, p. 53]. It is a fundamental principle of the Japanese aesthetics “the sad charm of things”, which Kawabata reveals in his speech. Later, formed by the metropolitan culture, Oe Kenzaburo finds Beauty, which he understands as “polysemantics.” The figurative framework of all the novels is full of complex reflections about preserving the free, perfect original harmony of a man and nature. The psychology of the author’s interpretation of the helpless child’s world by the Japanese writer reveals the logic of the motivation for actions and feelings, when the external society brutally destroys the unity with nature. All the young characters of the writers’ works are united by the aspiration for freedom, the symbol of which is water. Teenage characters built a schooner, studied maritime affairs and English, created the Union of Free Mariners, dreaming of leaving a closed and cruel world. The escape was illusory. It is not unexpected that for Oe Kenzaburo with his insular outlook, as

for all Japanese, the choice of a powerful sea giant – the Whale, suffering from poachers - is logical. “In the dead of night, the sea overflowed its coast, covered all the ground, and the whales, which had not been exterminated yet, having decided on the last resort, swam to the shelter and began to beat on its reinforced concrete walls with something soft, wet and heavy – their fins” [11].

The world image of M. Sholokhov is based on the deep knowledge of the Cossack style of life. Nature in the novel “The Quiet Don” is considered as an integral part of the world in which the epoch-making events of the Civil War unfold. For Grigory Melekhov, the sun becomes a symbol of time, which brightly illuminates moments of the joy of a peaceful life, and turns black at a tragic hour. “Towards evening, a storm was brewing. A brown cloud appeared above the farm. The Don, shagged by the wind, was throwing rigid frequent waves to its shores. A dry lightning was burning the sky behind the paddocks, the thunder was pressing the ground with rare rumbles. A vulture, stretching its wings, was criss-crossing under the cloud, crows were chasing him

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with a cry. The cloud, breathing chill, was moving along the Don, from the west. The sky blackened menacingly behind the flood land, the steppe was expectantly silent” [14, p. 29]. The natural location and detailed description in the poetics of Bunin's story “Dark Alleys” is retrospectively significant (“In mucky autumn weather, on one of the large Tula roads, flooded with rains and cut by many black ruts, to a long hut, in one connection of which there was a state-owned post house, and in the other one there was a private chamber, where one could have a rest...” [2, p. 8]), revealing not only the author's mood, but also his deep attachment to and understanding of the motherland. A total of 25 poems in the context of the novel “Doctor Zhivago” also, according to the article's authors, reveals Boris Pasternak's admiration of nature, which emerges as an integral part of the world order of a Russian person at the time. The intellectual, doctor and poet Yury Andreyevich Zhivago reinterprets historical facts through well-known and powerful metaphorical images - snowstorms, candles, snow, rain, winds). Moreover, the lyrical hero of the “Stanzas” by Iosif Brodsky echoes him;

for him Vasilyevsky Island in Leningrad is brimming with outlines of its bridges, April drizzle, snow, and the dark blue color of the poet's nostalgia for the "indifferent homeland". Thus, the art of declamation of the classic authors of the literature of Russia and the Asian-Oceanian countries conveys the humanistic idea of life in many ways.

#### 4. Conclusion

Summing up the observations on the publicist-like speeches of the writers, we should note that the Nobel lectures reveal the philosophical basis of the artistic creation, which is marked by the search for a humanistic beginning. The Nobel laureates consider the freedom of the artist to express his/her position as the main argument of literature. This study has shown the difficulty of correlating this material, which goes beyond the scope of an academic lecture into the field of verbal essays, the Japanese "following the brush", Chinese plotless prose, lyric poems, and confessions. Their heritage traces the literary traditions of their home countries, the national mindset, and creative manner. The analysis of some features of the poetics of works of art is

based on the identification of the genre and style singularity of the prose and poetry of the Nobel laureates. Applying biographical and historical information made it possible to identify not only the private motives, but also the general conceptual positions of the laureates. The unifying pathos of M. Sholokhov's reasoning is obvious: "We live on the earth, obey earth laws, and, as the Gospel says, our day is dominated by its malice, its cares and demands, its hopes for a better tomorrow" [2, p. 17]. The literary experience within the boundaries of the comparative study is relevant for moral education, forming the tolerance of readers, and intellectual reloading in the trans-border cultural area of the 21st century.

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