

## *Original Paper*

# The Human Nature Care of Psychobiography

## —A Book Review on *Destiny Can Violate*

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Received: June 28, 2023

Accepted: July 7, 2023

Online Published: July 12, 2023

doi:10.22158/asir.v7n3p15

URL: <http://doi.org/10.22158/asir.v7n3p15>

### **Abstract**

*If the real rock is hard, then human nature has a rainbow of brilliance. “Destiny Can Violate” is the first book in China to introduce the theory and methods of psychobiography, analyzing cases from the perspective of interdisciplinary research with “suspenseful questions” as the main method, opening up a new avenue for psychological research methods. The psychobiographical analysis of Zhuge Liang, the famous prime minister in ancient China, made us feel the conflict, beautification and understanding of human nature, which reflects the human nature care of psychobiography, thereby improving our understanding of ourselves.*

### **Keywords**

*Psychobiography, Zhuge Liang, human nature care, book review*

### **1. Introduction**

Long before psychology existed, humans created and told stories of human efforts to understand their problematic world. Novelists, playwrights, poets, and others—storytellers—continuously provide insights into human motivation and behavior, even in the century when human behavior was tested by scientific psychology (Sarbin, 1986). As contemporary scientific psychology continues to achieve the goal of understanding human behavior and motivation, psychobiography has emerged as another unique research method to the historical stage.

Compared to other disciplines, the problems raised by psychology in the past have not been resolved. What is the essence of human nature? Which is the greater impact of genetics and environment on human? The foundational and decisive debate on the relationship between mind and body has never ceased. Therefore, the difference between contemporary psychology and past psychology lies not in the research problems, but in the research methods. The research methods of contemporary scientific psychology have a huge driving force for us to understand human perception, memory, thinking,

imagination, decision-making, and other aspects. However, in precise data and perfect models, the shadow of “human” is dimmed, and the concept of human nature is blurred. As a result, psychobiography has entered the stage of history, especially in the United States, where there has been a renaissance in the past two decades (KÖv áry, 2011). The study of psychobiography in China has also begun to develop. Chinese scholars Professor Ding Xingxiang (1993) and Zheng Jianhong (1997) have successively pioneered the study of psychobiography in China. With the gradual maturity of psychobiography and the increasing number of related studies, the publication of the book *Psychobiographical Analysis of Historical Celebrities*(2017) has aroused great attention to the humanistic sentiment of psychology (Zhu, 2018; Liu & Zhou, 2018; Xi, 2019). *Destiny Can Violate: Zhuge Liang’s Psychobiographical Analysis of Behavioral Decision Making* (2018) is a further interpretation of the theory and practice of psychobiography. From an interdisciplinary perspective, we can truly feel that Zhuge Liang, the embodiment of wisdom that has existed for 1800 years in history, is also a mortal. After reading the book, we are affected by Zhuge Liang’s life story. Leaving those cold numbers, you will truly feel the existence of human nature, its warmth, its indifference, and completely construct a capital “person”.

## 2. The Conflict of Human Nature

The difference between the case history and the life history of psychobiography is that the former pays attention to discovering the conflict of human nature in the historical reality and finding its root so as to make an appropriate explanation. The inner conflict of great men can highlight this point, and this contradiction adds an indispensable impetus to their efforts (Erikson, 1969). Reviewing the case psychobiography analysis of this historical celebrity, you will see how the conflict of human nature has shaped a person’s “perfect” life step by step, and only by finding the root of its conflict can you find that this “perfect” life planted the seeds as early as childhood.

The two main lines running through the book—knowing that the Han Dynasty is difficult to prosper, why did he strive to revive the Han Dynasty? Knowing that the Northern Expedition was difficult to achieve, why did the Northern Expeditions continue—Suspended Zhuge Liang’s legendary life with “suspenseful questions”. People can’t help asking why such obvious contradictory behaviors accompany Zhuge Liang’s image of “wisdom”? This question has been reasonably explained in *Destiny Can Violate*, which is based on the theory of “psychology and human basic motivation”, “certainty and uncertainty”, “sense of security and control”, “sense of security and individual development” (Shu, 2018), and has inserted the research model of psychobiography into Zhuge Liang’s life introduction and writing career, all of which are presented in detail.

Zhuce Liang’s behavior conflict is self-evident. That is, why did the “Revitalization of the Han Dynasty” not choose the powerful Cao Cao or the small-scale Sun Quan when choosing the ruler? Instead, he chose the weak Liu Bei. Reviewing the book, we realized that he was motivated by a subconscious desire for security. From the perspective of human survival, individuals pursue certainty in order to

gain a sense of security (Shu, 2018). Zhuge Liang lost his parents when he was young, which made him lack of love from his parents. It was difficult to seek identity in his youth, and the lack of security was even more difficult to establish. Compared with Sun Quan's camp, choosing Liu Bei, who was short of advisers, would make him achieve great achievements, and his sense of security would be guaranteed. Coincidentally, Cao Cao put Zhuge Liang's hometown into war and made it face the fear of death. How can Zhuge Liang's childhood security be guaranteed? Just because of this, Zhuge Liang would not serve Cao Cao, that is, his "Cao Cao complex" would not allow him to do so. From this perspective, behind this seemingly contradictory behavior is actually a new way for individuals to rebuild their psychological world in search of a sense of security, and individual human nature conflicts are also explained by this behavioral path.

Knowing that the Northern Expedition was difficult, why did the Northern Expedition be repeated? "Knowingly" and "repeatedly" reflect the confrontation between Zhuge Liang's behavioral motivation at the level of consciousness and subconsciousness. Knowing that the strength of Cao Cao is strong, it has become an unshakable trend; knowing that the political position of the Sun Quan was still swinging around and still forming allies; knowing that the Northern Expedition labor and people hurt money but repeated the Northern Expedition and so on. So much "knowing" seems orthodox, but behind it contains a person's deep helplessness and weakness. Human beings' pursuit of certainty is essentially the pursuit of security in interpersonal relationships, and the sense of security and certainty based on interpersonal relationships ultimately point to the sense of control, that is, power motivation (Shu, 2018). Zhuge Liang's grasp of the sense of control was based on the Northern Expedition, which was not so much out of the national strategy of Liu Bei Group as to satisfy his personal motivation. Let the country continue to be in a state of war, as a "father" identity for a long time, you can delay the period of return to the young lord, the sense of control in the hands of the state power can be forever. However, it is precisely because of Zhuge Liang's sense of control that he died in Wuzhangyuan at a young age. Zhuge Liang's subconscious invisible hand that seeks control is manipulating him. He does not save money for his family, and only seeks the sense of security and control that was missing in his childhood. In this sense, the complexity and dark side of human nature are always mixed with the brilliant side of human nature. But no matter what, the conflict of human nature in everyone's life story has a reason.

### **3. The Beautification of Human Nature**

Vygotski said, "Know others, achieve yourself". When we read Zhuge Liang, we can feel the beautification of human nature, and then healing ourselves. How many of his bodies are not collective unconsciousness projected by human beings? How many collective fantasies of human nature have been satisfied by unreal historical materials such as "things are like gods", "unknown prophets", "empty city magic" and so on. These originate from our humanization of "meta images" in historical materials to "shaping images" in artistic forms (Shu, 2018). Because we need such an image of Zhuge Liang, we hope he is almost perfect. The monarch hopes that he will selflessly contribute to the country;

Scholars throughout history hoped that he would satisfy their “imperial teacher complex”; The common people hope that he is extremely intelligent.

Art and history complement each other, and the artistic transformation of historical figures is not so much about people praising the subject, but rather about satisfying people’s pursuit of the object of their own soul sublimation. *Destiny Can Violate* is not to deny Zhuge Liang’s great achievements, but we are trying to explore new things, try to understand the little known stories behind celebrities, and find and distinguish the inevitable and accidental factors that affect the development of their life path through the interpretation of their life stories. We cannot replicate accidental factors, so can we grasp some inevitable factors that are similar to our life story to predict and achieve the maximization of the future? This should be where we continue to learn and research.

#### **4. Understanding of Human Nature**

The research pleasure of psychobiography lies in the interpretation of the life story of the case, which is methodologically based on the hermeneutic method of experience as an analogue of text (Xu, 2012). This methodology echoes the view of the internationally renowned psychobiologist William Schultz (2005) that if you want to better understand people, you need interpretation, not the manipulation of variables. We need researchers to go deep into the individual’s life, read the works, analyze the dreams, the diaries, and the letters, and maintain their subjectivity and assumptions (worldview). The research mode of *Destiny Can Violate* is like this. The analysis mode with “suspenseful questions” as the core is based on the history of life, writings, friends and correspondence of the case. Through repeated reading of historical materials, the suspenseful point is condensed, and then the data analysis is combined with the appropriate theory to explain it, and finally the writing of the psychobiography is completed (Shu, 2018). Its research ideas carry forward the “problem-centered” psychological humanistic tradition of psychobiography (Zheng, 2014), revealing the unique life story and life experience of the research objective, which provides a way for us to understand human nature. It is not to study people in the context of experimental control (Carlson, 1971), but to show the psychological process according to the original appearance of individual life history, and also believes that the “ecological” explanation is more enlightening to understand human nature. As a clear methodological guidance and case study source in China, *Destiny Can Violate* promotes psychological research results in a more public oriented manner at the level of psychology popularization (Ma & Song, 2019).

#### **5. Conclusion**

As an important sub-field of psychohistory, psychobiography has become a characteristic field and cornerstone of psychology because of its disciplinary particularity in psychohistory (Fouche, 2015). Its characteristics are reflected in the fact that psychobiography studies the whole life course of individuals from birth to death, aiming to identify, discover and express the core story of the whole life, and to interpret human nature in the whole life story. When researchers and readers are involved in the life

story of the case, who will not cause thinking resonance and emotional resonance due to similar life experiences? As the book author said: “Psychobiography is a bridge between ordinary people and great people” (Shu, 2012), then the writing of *Destiny Can Violate* makes this bridge more solid, so that we have a deeper understanding of the conflict, beautification and understanding of human nature. The analysis model based on the “suspenseful questions” introduced in this book and the mutual subject, combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis and self-psychological biography analysis jointly promote the development of psychobiography (Shu, 2018). Future research should continue to develop new analysis models to provide an effective window for us to face psychological facts and understand ourselves.

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