

Original Paper

A Study of Writing of China in W. H. Auden's *Journey to a War*

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Abstract

China is one of the countries that paid a precious price during World War II. In this unprecedented human catastrophe, as an important force in the world's anti-fascist alliance and the main battlefield of the East, China, together with other countries committed to gaining the national and international independence and made significant national sacrifices and historical contributions to eventually win the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. In that critical era, British poet W. H. Auden went to China in 1938 with his close friend and companion, British writer Christopher Isherwood to witness the reality and became the first pack to make it known to the world. As a war correspondent, he recorded the Chinese battlefield under World War II from a perspective that transcended any particular national, racial, gender, class, and touching writing style, leaving behind many precious first-hand materials, which are extremely valuable in history and literary ethics and inspiring for future generations.

Keywords

W.H.Auden, Writing of China, Journey to a War, War Ethics

1. Introduction

Encouraged by the special background, this article conducts research on the writing of China in Auden's *Journey to a War*. Combining with the methodology of ethical literary criticism proposed by Chinese scholars based on drawing inspiration from Western ethical criticism and Chinese moral

criticism, it extracts Chinese writing from *Journey to a War* to analyze Auden's ethical concepts. Thus, an analysis of China's image in the eyes of foreigners during World War II can be carried out by examining three aspects of the ethical insights derived from Auden's war ethics and comparing the similarities and differences between China's war ethics and those of Auden, a distinguished perspective.

W. H. Auden's *Journey to a War* takes a realistic view to record the vital aspects of China from a series of aspects. It was composed collaboratively by two British writers, W. H. Auden, and Christopher Isherwood, however, the latter served more likely as Auden's travel companion, accompanying the former to China in 1938. The beginning of this trip to China was due to Auden being commissioned by London's Faber and Random House in 1937 to write a travel book about the East. In the anthem of *Journey to a War*, he recorded his six-month journey around China. This work is divided into two parts, the first half is an essay written by Christopher, and the second half is a poem written by Auden. Auden adopted a simplified sonnet to explore war, as well as the history and ethics behind war. The first half of the poem series is a condensed documentary film that records the wars in human society. Each sonnet records the changes of people from different professions in different social classes during the long years of war. The second half of the poem is like a camera during the Sino-Japanese War, and readers seem to be able to directly capture a series of images of the war through textual descriptions. Even though W. H. Auden had a clear sense of identity, he was well aware of injustice, aggression, and war. Therefore, when Auden wrote about the Sino-Japanese War, his pen carried a strong moral stance and profound moral wisdom. Each poem in the latter half of this section elucidates the moral meaning reflected in *the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression*.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Brief Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism

Since the reform and opening up, the field of Chinese literary ethics criticism has always been dominated by Western theories, with both the purpose and perspective of criticism largely following the logic of Western theories (Nie, 2014, pp. 3-4). As the Chinese literary critics proficiently apply the logic of Western literary criticism to the criticism of Chinese literature, the Chinese literary criticism community has developed a new understanding of literary criticism. As a result, scholars from various Chinese literary criticism studies have devoted themselves to the task of studying the logic of literary criticism that belongs to China's own creation. Among them, Critic Zhenzhao Nie combined the concept of Western literary ethics and proposed the literary ethical criticism structure of China. He believes that the entire history of human civilization is the history of constant repetition of natural selection and ethical selection (Nie, 2014, p. 78). In the process of ethical choice, people's ethical consciousness begins to emerge, and the concept of good and evil gradually comes into being. Ethical choices are achieved through education, and churches are obtained through literature. Literature

provides guidance for human ethical choices. The history of human civilization has shown that it is mostly the literature that can achieve the purpose of education, reward, and punishment through a series of moral examples, thereby helping people complete the process of choosing good and abandoning evil, and learn how to become a moral person. So Zhenzhao Nie places greater emphasis on the role of literature in providing moral differentiation and guidance and proposes relevant terms and logic for ethical criticism of Chinese literature.

Ethical literary criticism stems from the fertile field of theories and thoughts. It is a critical method of reading, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating literature from an ethical perspective. Literary ethical criticism regards ethical choice as the theoretical basis and believes that ethical choice is a process that human beings must go through after completing natural selection. Ethical choices are achieved through education, which is obtained through literature. Literary ethical criticism regards literature as a product of morality from its origin, believing that literature is a form of expression of social ethics in a specific historical stage, and that literature is essentially an art about ethics. The task of literature is to describe the changes in this ethical order and the problems and consequences it causes, providing experience and guidance for the progress of human civilization. Literary ethical criticism takes literary texts as the object of criticism, interpreting the different life phenomena described in literature from an ethical perspective, and exploring the moral and educational values hidden within them.

Compared with numerous critical approaches, literary ethical criticism has a significant contribution in interpreting the different life phenomena and their ethical reasons described in literature from an ethical perspective and making value judgments on them. Literary ethical criticism, as a methodology, emphasizes the social responsibility of literature and its criticism, the educational function of literature, and the return to the ethical scene of history. It involves interpreting literary works through an ethical lens that takes the prevailing moral values of the time into account, analyzing the ethical factors that lead to social events and affect the characters' fate, and evaluating the ethical choices, processes, and outcomes of various characters from an ethical perspective. In short, it aims to obtain the moral teachings and warnings from the ethical choices both in history and reality and to explore their significance for us today.

From 1960 until 2023, among the foreign academic circle, the research on Auden developed earlier and accumulated a wide range of directions, such as studying Auden's personal experience, appreciating Auden's poetry collections, and studying the ethics and metaphorical significance of Auden's poetic texts. Among them, the most researched are the review papers, focusing on how his Chinese experience influenced and shaped Auden's poetic swerve and transformation. However, there are also a few scholars who have studied Chinese writing in *Journey to a War* and even fewer who have studied it from the perspective of ethical criticism. D. Brown in "Wandering Lost: Searching for the End in Auden and Isherwood's *Journey to a War*" argues that it illustrates Auden's insistence on irony, reflexivity, and the significance of the cultural and inter-civilizational encounter with China. Moreover,

Journey is revealed as an anticipation of subsequent ideological and political developments and as a late-modern, late-colonialist precursor of postmodern and postcolonial literary concerns (Brown, 2007). Compared with international scholars, Chinese domestic researchers have developed relatively late in their research on Auden. Most of the papers, like international scholars, focus on the connotation of Auden's poetry itself and the relationship between moral and political characteristics in the poem. However, due to the fact that *Journey to a War* records the actual situation of the Far East battlefield during World War II, it sparks a high enthusiasm among domestic scholars to study the anti-fascist spirit. Scholars in China are starting to study Auden's *Journey to a War*. Among them, Li Yujin believes that in cross-border travel, modernists experience many aspects of modernity from the dimensions of space and time, and the writing of China in *Journey to a War* reflects Auden's attention to reality and politics. Auden comprehended China with the enlightened ideas of modernists and had confidence in China's future, but he did not completely shake off the mentality of Eurocentrism, which probably he did not realize by himself since it was really hard for a person to recognize certain unconscious immersion. The trip to China changed their views of war, recognizing its cruelty and hoping to transform modern society through actions (Li, 2020). Besides, in "A Study of Auden's Reflection on the Relationship between War and Modern Civilization", Tang Boqin reckons that *Journey to a War* is not only a political thematic poem that conveys the viewpoint of war but also contains Auden's humanistic care for the entire human survival situation in that turbulent era and ethical thinking about the development prospects of modern civilization. Although Auden criticized the destruction of modern civilization and human nature caused by war, he also clearly realized that war was inevitable in the foreseeable future, and for the development of modern civilization, war indeed had its positive value in existence. At the same time, Auden fulfilled his social and ethical identity as a poet through literary creation, which entrusted him with the responsibility of using his works to inspire and educate the world (Tang, 2020).

Although China developed relatively lately its academic plowing in the field of Auden's poems, research on "The Writing of China in Auden's Poems" can represent the current studying trend in recent years, especially in the *Journal of a War* on the ethical issues behind the war. However, these studies mainly focus on the moral reflection of human civilization on war as a whole and rarely focus on the essential consciousness of the poet and analyses of due reasons in representative writing of China contained in the poetry itself. Also, the main object of analysis is to analyze the anti-Japanese attitudes of China and anti-fascist countries during World War II. Therefore, in this article, we will conduct in-depth research on The Sonnets of W. H. Auden by using the method of analyzing the writing of China in the *Journal of a War*, in the hope of filling the gaps in the academic community in this regard.

3. The Authentic Writing of China

3.1 *The Misery of China in View of the Nanjing Massacre*

Auden's 12th poem goes like this, "Here War is Harmless like a Monument..." (Auden, 1939, p. 25). Nanjing Massacre. In this poem, Auden focuses his camera writing on a headquarters on the battlefield of the anti-Japanese war. A major battle begins immediately after the end of a phone call by the Japanese commanding officer. The first gunfire occurred after the planting of a flag by the general. Facing this situation, Auden is sad because he knows that the flags on the battlefield of the two countries signify the massacre of countless people. This war inevitably reminds Auden of the Nanjing Massacre which is a disaster for humans. But as for Auden, a poem is a recorder, in which he can not do anything but only record the true war situation vividly and constantly to tell future generations about the cruelty of the war. What does war bring to human beings? The monument it erects is not a symbol of victory, but a monument that buries countless innocent souls in the conflict. Here, Auden used the term "simplicity" to describe the aggressor's intention to attack. During the Chinese battlefield in World War II, the aggressors showed no sympathy or respect for human life. For them, the ruins after the war were the glory of the victors, the bloody sacrifices of millions of people were the unique charm of war, and the intention of war was simply to establish a monument that could commemorate their "glorious" footprints in invading the world. This ironic rhetorical device also expresses Auden's satire and disdain for the tragic World War II launchers.

Auden's poetry acts as a camera that constantly zooms in and focuses, on how the war begins to the reactions of people before the war approaches (Auden, 1939, p. 253). There is a plan for leaving men in terror of their lives to the facial expressions of soldiers before they go to the battlefield. This piece of writing presents an accurate and truthful account of a war similar to the "Nanjing Massacre" (Auden, 1939, p. 253). And maps can point to places where life is evil now, while also affirming that the war facts of the "Nanjing Massacre" cannot be erased by Japan's continuous distortion and denial of history and the existence of the Nanjing Massacre in recent years.

3.2 *The Insensitive and Apathetic Chinese Bourgeoisie*

In the 15th poem of the Auden series, there goes "As evening fell the day's oppression lifted..." (Auden, 1939, p. 255). There is a writing of China as well: the callous bourgeoisie. This time, Auden turned the camera from the bloody war to the life of another Chinese class in the big city, that is, Shanghai. The main characters of this poem are those "well-educated" diplomats and so-called upper-class people. Despite the chaos of war, the Chinese bourgeoisie depicted by Auden still enjoys a tranquil life, tidying up their exquisite gardens, looking up at the night sky, murmuring beautiful poetry, and discussing books. They also have gardeners and drivers to serve their daily lives. The Chinese bourgeoisie is not only unable to prevent the war from occurring but also is the direct source of chaos for they are weak, incompetent, and insensitive in the face of war, and detached from the sufferings of the innocent proletariat who bear the aftermath of the war, just watching them cry and be massacred on the land that

has been flattened by war.

This also means that the Chinese bourgeoisie could not lead the majority of Chinese people to defeat the invaders. The reason why the Chinese bourgeoisie is weak is less due to their personality, but more rather because of their lack of military force trust, essentially of trust by the public. To be precise, they do not have swords as the representation of military power and always remained detached from the masses, and there is a confrontation with the masses on the class level. Therefore, they can only deceive people with words, and attract people with wealth, but do not have a strong force to deter the enemy. Auden observed this bustling commercial port in Asia and saw the weakness of the Chinese bourgeoisie, as well as the disparity between rich and poor. The comparison of the two shots truthfully reflects the sharp social class conflicts in China during World War II and the severe situation of China's internal and external troubles.

3.3 The Rebellious Spirit of the Chinese People

Writing of China is also presented in the 25th poem of the series by Auden, which reads "There is nothing at hand, we must find our law" (Auden, 2012, p. 298). It depicts the rebellious spirit of the Chinese people. According to Mr. John Fuller's research, this poem presents the reality of Shanghai at that time. Before then, Shanghai had already fallen into the hands of the Japanese occupation, but the resolute Chinese people could not endure such severe suppression anymore. The surrounding dust and dilapidated buildings constantly reminded Chinese people of human equality, and the people must retrieve order and compete for China's rightful position under the sun. In this set of poems, Auden confronts this unfamiliar city in a foreign land and the brutality of the war. Auden's ethical view of caring for humanity conflicts with the war ethics recognized by the inhumane invaders. At this time, Auden makes his own ethical choice—he prioritizes morality over the political and social utility of the poem, seeking to bring an end to all this pain. So, based on the rebellious spirit of the Chinese people amid the war, he made an appeal in his poetry to the general public who suffered amid the war: "There is nothing at hand: we must find our laws" (Auden, 2012, p. 297). Finally, in his poetry, he also gave a Lyric condensed answer: "There is nothing at hand: we must retrieve our laws. Tall buildings are vying for dominance under the sun; behind them, like pitiful plants, stretched low and cramped slums" (Auden, 2012, p. 297). People in war have learned compassion and rebellion. If war has made humanity aware of anything, then it must be: sympathizing with all humans who are subjected to unjust oppression but strongly resisting it, and seeking the dawn of fairness and justice in the world. From this perspective, it is not by chance that China, which perseveres in resistance to the end, achieved ultimate victory in the war. The desire to seek a bright future for the world can unite humanity that struggles to survive under unfair will and maintain justice in the world with a spirit of resistance.

3.4 China as a Tolerant Nation

Auden wrote a writing of China "The Flower-like Hundred Families..." (Auden, 1939, p. 253) in his 11th poem that "Certainly praise..." (Auden, 1939, p. 253). Starting from this poem, Auden entered the

harsh reality of war and the destination of his travels, China. In this set of poems, Auden first unfolds a picture of the Chinese people living and working in peace and contentment without any war: plants grow recklessly, animals stretch out beautifully, humans and nature coexist peacefully, and generations have multiplied and thrived on this fertile land. “Certainly praise: let song again and again for life as it blossoms out in a jar or a face, for vegetal patience, for animal courage and grace. Some have been happy; some, even, were great men” (Auden, 1939, p. 253).

But WWII swept through this peaceful land that had not been violated for over 5000 years. The crying of grievances in the early morning, the corrupt city and humanity, and the unfair will have torn apart the dreams of all humanity sleeping soundly in happiness. China, a nation that was as tolerant as flowers, has not been spared due to this spiritual core. The flower-like tolerant nation is Auden’s qualitative judgment of China and the Chinese nation based on his understanding of Chinese history and his interaction with Chinese people. From this writing, “the flower-like Hundred families who for so long in the Eighteen Provinces have modified the earth” (Auden, 1939, p. 253), it can be seen that Auden’s opinion that he believes the Chinese nation’s forbearance is similar to that of wild grasses and flowers. Even if they encounter a major disaster caused by ground fire, they can still endure and stand firm. “One star has warned to birth, one puzzled species that has yet to prove its worth: the quick new West is false and prodigious but wrong” (Auden, 1939, p. 252). In the spring of the following year, new green will bloom all over the mountains and fields. Despite such a nation’s best efforts to refrain from engaging in harmful actions and its resilience in the face of disasters, it is still tortured and destroyed by aggressors in war and further victimized by the lies of the emperor’s arbitrary words. It should be noted that a country with a history of five thousand years is not only guarding the civilization of one country but also the crystallization of all human civilization. The birth of an ancient country cannot survive alone. This is a civilization miracle that must be achieved through thousands of years of cultural exchange, trade, and transportation, and the joint participation of all humanity. The “ethical environment” (Nie, 2014, pp. 247-248) in China is peace-loving and it also shapes Chinese tolerant character. Tolerance has always been the spiritual core of China’s international communication, and this core has also contributed to China’s modest efforts to the common security of humanity. Based on this ethical environment, all the poems in Auden’s *Journey to a War* have constructed an “ethical identity” (Nie, 2014, p. 250) for China—fortitude and perseverance. As an artist, Auden himself, and all the works he produces, are not isolated. Instead, they are all included in the overall overview of the spirit and customs of his time. Without any clear recording equipment, an international identity of China at that time was recorded and built in his poetry works. As for the greatness of his literary works, it lies in its truthful reflection of the era in which the author lived, praising the glory of human civilization spirit, and condemning the unfair will under human civilization. People are forgetful, and time will erase human memories, but it will not erase the writing of this record in the text. This writing of China strongly proves the enduring image of China as a nation of great tolerance, which has long been

recognized as by the world after being truly understood.

4. Auden's Ethical View in the Journey to a War

4.1 The Wrong Ethical Choice: Abandoning the Good and Turning to the Evil

Unlike other war journalists' works on ethics, Auden's *Journey to a War* chose a more grand perspective to document the Chinese theater during World War II. He used a pair of camera-like eyes to give every person and every group in the war zone a shot, objectively and truthfully reflecting the facts of the war, and he tried to find the essence of war beyond the country, gender, and class through these exquisite shots. In Auden's view, war stems from humanity's erroneous ethical choice of abandoning good and choosing evil.

Firstly, in the eleventh poem of the series, "He looked in all His wisdom from His Throne..." (Auden, 1939, p. 251), Auden uses Greek mythological allusions (e.g., Zeus seduces the beautiful boy Ganymede) to embed the fulcrum of human observation in the entire series: human nature is complex, and even those who grow up with goodwill still have a reverence for evil in their bones. In Auden's works, Zeus wants to guide the youth to understand the truth, but the youth is very impatient and repeatedly resists and avoids his guidance. As soon as he hears Zeus's conversation, he would "yawn", "whistle", and "make a face". But when in the company of the eagle, the boy displays a deep willingness to learn and follow, not only "going to the place where the eagle suggested" but also "learning many ways of killing" from the eagle, because the boy instinctively likes the eagle. This phenomenon can be explained as follows from the perspective of literary ethics: human beings have the characteristics of the sphinx factor, the natural will that someone was born with is a beast factor, and the rational will generated under ethical constraints is a human factor. If a newborn person is likened to a balloon filled with ink, then the ethical concept given to him by the teaching in life is the injection of water into the balloon. The collision and fusion of ink and water in the balloon can be seen as a metaphorical battle between the beast factor and the human factor, which presents a moral dilemma that forces people to make ethical choices.

It is inaccurate to assume that the beast factors within human beings will be entirely eradicated as more human factors are integrated. It's probably safe to conclude that beast factors still exist in clear water, and even though it is just diluted, it's still ready to appear as the water evaporates. The eradication of the war is the extreme result of this erroneous ethical choice—the battle between the beast factor and the human factor, in the end, the beast factor triumphs over the human factor, and humanity chooses to abandon good and turn to evil.

4.2 War mustn't be on other Choice for Modernization

The theme of Auden's 12th poem series reads "So an age ended, and its last deliverer died..." (Auden, 1939, p. 252) is the Renaissance's victory over the ignorant Middle Ages and the rise of modern people. The early Christian faith has come to an end, and a modern world is being nurtured. But new fallacies

continue to emerge, those who insist on modernization by War are getting more and more rampant, ignorant, and savage after the war, and do not want to stop. War is transformed into madness within humanity. In Auden's view, there is no standard for determining whether a civilization is good or bad, whether it is an old civilization or a new civilization. Therefore, no civilization can be considered perfect. It is simply absurd to replace a civilization that humans consider to be backward with an advanced civilization. Therefore, Auden firmly believes that in the development process of history, the replacement of civilization is a manifestation of human inner madness, which is why humans use the name of war to proclaim the justice of war and conceal the satisfaction of their own selfish desires.

4.3 Violent war killing under human sin

The theme conveyed by Auden in his 14th poem goes in this way, "Yes, we are ready to bear it at this moment..." (Auden, 2012, p. 275) and the 15th poem "The engine carrying them flying across the sky..." (Auden, 2012, p. 277) is very clear: it is precisely human nature that causes the evil and slaughter on earth at this moment.

In the fourteenth poem series, Auden chooses to directly criticize the evil side of human nature: "Behind every pair of friendly and nostalgic eyes, those secret massacres are happening; women, Jews, rich people, everyone" (Auden, 2012, p. 275). In the 15th poem series (Auden, 2012, p. 277), Auden also experienced the horror caused by the Japanese air raid on China: "The engines of the planes carried them across the sky: they were like wealthy people, comfortable and isolated". "The Japanese saw the living city as only a target that needed to demonstrate their skills" (Auden, 2012, p. 277). Auden truly recorded in these two poems the inhumane indiscriminate killing of their own kind by the invaders in World War II, even the innocent populace. They also need to raise the butcher's knife to satisfy their inner sins. Faced with such cruelty and suffering, Auden, full of humanitarian care, couldn't bear it anymore. His gaze pierced through the current war and mercilessly exposed the ugliness of human sin "The fate they chose was not forced by the island they lived on" (Auden, 2012, p. 277). Therefore, in Auden's view, war was not entirely a coercion of national rights, but also a result of conscious personal choices. The evil in the human nature of the aggressors drove the Japanese pilots who dropped bombs on China and all their violent individuals to directly participate in the evil.

4.4 Justice Forever

Justice will ultimately triumph over evil. Auden deeply understands that literary works should achieve the goals of teaching, reward, and punishment by writing a series of moral examples. Only by creating such positive literary works, can it help people complete the ethical choice process of choosing the good and abandoning the evil, and becoming a moral person. Therefore, Auden portrays the rebellious Chinese people as moral role models in his poetry series, and he also expresses his position that justice will ultimately triumph over evil.

So in the 21st poem of the series, Auden directly foreshadows the outcome of the aggressor's criminal behavior "Failure is their wives accompanying them; anxiety accepting them like a big restaurant"

(Auden, 2012, p. 289). These two lines are Auden's masterstroke, a remarkable work of art that not only accurately reflects the event itself, but also has the foresight to accurately predict the outcome of the event. The ending of this poem series once again adopts a personification technique, personifying freedom. After the war, freedom still exists, but it no longer belongs to the evil, and freedom will be full of hostility towards the evil, in every house and bush. In terms of the definition of freedom, different civilizations have different tendencies, reflecting two distinct values of the East and the West. China advocates collectivism, which advocates that individuals belong to society and that individual interests should be subordinate to the interests of the group, nation, class, and state. Its highest standard is that all words and actions are in line with the interests of the collective. As a European, Auden grew up in an environment where he believed in individualistic culture and was an individualist. Therefore, when Auden saw that Chinese minors were gathered by the state to go to the battlefield to protect the country, Auden did not understand this behavior of abandoning personal interests and protecting national interests and he even felt that letting minors take part in war was very cruel. Western culture gradually separates individuals from nature and society in the process of handling relationships between the individual and groups, and society, countries, and the world, which thus eventually establishes the central position of individual values. They promote personal independence, advocate personal struggle, pursue personal enjoyment, and believe that the individual is both the subject of value and the subject of realizing value. At the same time, they also advocate for individualism, believing that the individual is the end in itself and has the highest value. When there is a conflict between personal interests and collective interests, they oppose the unprincipled sacrifice of personal interests for the benefit of the collective and others. But this trip to China also gave Auden more thought about freedom. The definition of freedom varies with different situations. If a person insists on personal freedom and disregards the survival of a country when facing its fate, then personal freedom is also difficult to guarantee. The launch of a war will affect the world, and even all humanity. Therefore, humanitarian poet Auden created *Journey to a War* based on his sensitivity to politics and interpretation of the essence of human nature, which still holds enlightening significance today.

5. Inspiration for Ethics of War

5.1 Establishing the Correct Ethics of War

Ethics of war will never abide by the law of the jungle. Many countries that initiated wars violated other weaker countries under the banner of the law of the jungle. The specific connotation of the law of the jungle is "the survival of the fittest" It is the basic law of survival competition for all creatures in nature. Only by complying with the law of the jungle can nature maintain ecological balance, establish natural order, and ensure the continuous purification of species. However, it is clear that the evolution process of all organisms except human beings is a process of survival competition (Peng, 2019, pp. 23-24). Human beings possess human nature through acquired education, and the existence of human

nature is the basis for human beings to distinguish themselves from other living beings. Therefore, it is not appropriate to simply apply the ethics of nature to human daily life, let alone apply them to war, and simply apply them as war ethics. The invaders in World War II claimed that their war was reasonable, and justified their actions by mistakenly applying the law of the jungle to the war ethics. They fight against their fellow humans without humanity, to the extent that the entire world is embroiled in war due to this erroneous theoretical logic, and the people are struggling to make a living.

5.2 Defining the Nature of War

China's ethics of war lie in that justice eventually conquers injustice. China is not unwilling to initiate war, rather, since China loves peace. However, it is not only China but any other country or individual that pursues the fundamental right to survive. Therefore, China will never ever launch any unjust war initially, for the reason that if a person does not offend Chinese people, Chinese people will never offend them initially, which is universally considered as the gold rule for the Chinese (Kong, 2020, pp. 56-57). The ethical characteristics of China's war are also implicit in Auden's characterization of the Chinese nation as a "flower-like tolerant nation" (Auden, 2012, p. 273). The Chinese nation's forbearance is to set a tolerance limit for those who violate China, and the Chinese nation's courage is not to be angry but to be intimidated. If the Chinese nation is not launching an expulsion, if the aggressors have self-awareness, they should pack up their bags and leave as soon as possible. If the Chinese nation is forced to endure beyond endurance, the aggressors will inevitably be counterattacked by the resilient Chinese nation (Shi, 2022, pp. 5-6). The traditional Chinese concept of just warfare starts from the people-oriented perspective, defining the rights and wrongs of war, clearly proposing a clear stance in support of just warfare, affirming the progressive role of just warfare, and expressing the belief that just warfare will prevail (Zhou, 2022). It still has great practical reference significance to this day.

6. Conclusion

This study has excavated four Chinese writings in Auden's Journey to a War sonnets and summarized Auden's ethical viewpoints reflected behind the four Chinese writings. In the sonnet series of Auden's Journey to a War, there are also many suggestive Chinese writings. This article only narrates the four most obvious pieces. Through these four Chinese writings, the memories of the 1930s in China are projected onto many people's minds like a film projector. Even if many people have not really participated in the war, they seem to be able to hear the wailing under the flames of war and see the brutality of the invaders and the chaos in Auden's body. Such a shocking scene was truly heartbreaking and heart-provoking. So these four Chinese writings also strongly support Auden's ethical views reflected behind them. As a poet full of humanistic sentiments, Auden expresses deep sympathy and care for people who suffer under unfair will. At the same time, Auden firmly believed that war originated from the evil in human nature. He was extremely angry and hated the evil in human nature,

but he also always believed that justice would triumph over all darkness one day. In today's era of peace, many people may not participate in such a fierce war again, but Auden's exposure of the evil side of human nature still has enlightening significance for us today. It should be understood that in order for humans to continuously progress, one manifestation must be the effort to drive their internal human factors to overcome animal factors.

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