

# A Study of Premodern Folk Women's Narrative Literature in Female Script

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## Abstract:

Folk women's literature has always been a field of little research in the literary academic community. Due to the lack of seriousness in its texts, difficulty in collecting, and insufficient representative texts, many literatures analyse these texts from cultural and social perspectives. However, this article aims to explore the literary value behind these texts and prove that folk women can also achieve self-empowerment through literary creation.

**Keywords:** Folk women's literature, premodern, literary value, insufficient

## 1. Introduction

Folk women's literature has always been a field of little research in the literary academic community. Due to the lack of seriousness in its texts, difficulty in collecting, and insufficient representative texts, many literatures analyse these texts from cultural and social perspectives. However, this article aims to explore the literary value behind these texts and prove that folk women can also achieve self-empowerment through literary creation.

In China's premodern society, women's living space was strictly placed in the rural structure. Women can't voice, can't complain or escape. Therefore, the way of private women's self-empowerment must be divorced from the patriarchal social structure, but its content cannot be divorced from the social structure. In this way, it is reasonable to regard "无用之用 (wu yong zhi yong, a famous quote from Chinese Taoism philosophy, stands for "useless use")" literature as such a way of self-empowerment.

The female script texts in Jiangyong area, as the only text completely invented, written and created by women in China, provides us with an excellent example. Most people think that the emergence and prosperity of Jiangyong female script mainly concentrated in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and gradually declined after the founding of the people's Republic of China for various reasons. Jiangyong area is in the mountainous area, with inconvenient transportation, and is a mixed area of ethnic minorities culture. The history, geography, culture and many other factors in Jiangyong area provide many conditions for the birth of women's script. We can also see the connection between these elements and women in Jiangyong area from women's script literature.

This paper will focus on the analysis of the logic of the image of female scripts, and connect them through history, so as to show readers the way in which folk women achieve self-expression and empowerment through the value of literary creation. Because of time and other issues, women in the premodern period were trapped in the field, such as the literary creation of female scripts, both in form and content has strong local characteristics, but at the same time, it still presents the state of strong feminist literature. Combined with the phenomenological theory, it explores the individual and collective narratives in female scripts, the image of unconscious birth in the creation of premodern times, and the unique local characteristics of female scripts born in Jiangyong area.

Therefore, this article places its focus on the creation of folk women's literature. Undoubtedly, this is a text library that the academic community does not pay much attention to, as its pure literary value as pure literature is not significant enough, but the value of pure literature itself is a different topic from its value to the world. That is why the author chooses to explore the background of the text and literature, attempting to uncover the unique literary power of women who had been buried by the history in the soil.

## 2. Literature Review

Female script is a widely used writing symbol system in the Jiangyong area of Hunan Province. It is generally believed to be a variant of Chinese characters, created and written by women, and sung among women. Female script emerged in response to the emergence of needs of communication, interaction, and revolts against male that appeared due to the oppression of women in rural area.

Scholars nowadays have conducted extensive exploration and research on female scripts from many perspectives: the collection and organization of basic information on female scripts, the family, nature, and origin of female scripts, the literary nature of female scripts, the relationship between women's social groups and female scripts, women's education, and the protection, inheritance, and development of female scripts. Along with massive amount of research, multiple academic papers have been published.

### 2.2.1 Collection and basic information organization of female scripts materials

The collection and basic information organization of female scripts mainly focus on collecting, organizing, and translating female scripts. There are many examples of such collection and organization. The "Investigation Report on a Special Language" published by Gong Zhebing in 1983 symbolizes the discovery of female scripts; Xie Zhimin's "Mystery of Jiangyong's" Female Scripts "published in 1991 includes the original materials of female scripts he collected over several decades; Zhao Liming's" Collection of Chinese Female Scripts "published in 1992 covers the classification and phonetic arrangement of female scripts; and additionally, at the 16th International Conference on Sino Tibetan Linguistics, Gong Zhebing published a paper titled "Analysis of Yao Characters in Jiangyong Pingdi, Hunan", introducing female scripts to foreign countries for the first time.

The literature research on female scripts can be seen from Zhao Liming's article "Female Scripts - A Special Type of Women's Literature". Nowadays, scholars generally classify female scripts as "bitter literature", which mainly focuses on the mutual communication of women about their inner struggles.

### 2.2 The Expression Forms of Female Scripts

In addition to the above contents, scholars have also conducted in-depth research on female scripts from different aspects such as their forms of expression. In his paper Mysterious Patterns and Mysterious Female Characters - Cultural Interpretation of them 'Octagonal Flower' Pattern in Female Scripts, He Hongyi proposed that female scripts are a decorative cultural symbol system, including female scripts' characters and patterns, reflecting the value of female scripts in art. Also, Liao Ningjie's "Cultural Connotation and Morphological Characteristics of Female Scripts Songs" and Zhang Ying's "Research on the Tones of Female Scripts Songs in Jiangyong, Hunan" explore the characteristics of female scripts when they are sung as songs. Furthermore, the research on female scripts calligraphy has divided it into more than ten writing forms, and

the Chengxi Female Scripts Calligraphy Copybook was also published in 2001.

In 2002, Zhou Shuoyi, a local scholar in Jiangyong, published the Female Scripts Dictionary, which made great contributions to the deciphering of female scripts. Tang Gongwei collected various female scripts objects, including original female scripts, actual women's red books (女红实物是啥) and so on, and published papers such as "Unique Numerals and Quantifiers in Female Scripts' Popular Regions". The culture of female scripts is reflected in various aspects such as art, music, and calligraphy, with diverse research methods and carriers.

## 3. The collective narrative and private narrative in the female script

The female script is the main carrier of women's collective activities in Jiangyong, China. During important social events such as weddings and funerals, women participate in cultural activities such as chanting the female script and antiphonal singing. At the same time, the female script also serves as the only carrier of women's private correspondence, creative exchanges, etc. In addition to this, the female script is learned through mother-to-daughter transmission. The female script is a collective narrative among local women, household women, and women in general.

Although there is no restriction on the gender of the learners and users of the female script, "men writing the female script" is still a rare case in the female script culture as men have no interest in or need to know about women's cultural activities. Meanwhile, the female script was born as a result of the invention of characters and words because women could not acquire cultural knowledge through schools and other means. This reflects the importance of women's self-expression of the female gender behind the birth and inheritance legacy of the female script; in other words, women in the pre-modern period were compelled to obtain a narrative of the cultural field that was exclusively female, because the cultural body on the ground at that time was still based on patriarchy.

Therefore, the collective narrative of the female script is oriented to all women in the Jiangyong area. It often appears in cultural activities such as weddings and funerals, and in letters between women, and reflects the fact that women's narratives in the whole local culture exist as an independent narrative in the whole Jiangyong culture.

At the same time, literature and cultural events using the female script are not short with their authors' private narratives. The female script also contains a multitude of highly personal literature, including, but not limited to, diary entries, letters, self-creations, and feelings about life. Among the many themes we can find in the texts of

the female script are daily life, sisterhood, uneasiness about marriage, dissatisfaction, and helplessness about the restrictions placed on women by society, and sorrow from unknown sources. This literature, which exists only in the boudoir, is a woman's unconditional self-expression: it is created in a wholly private space to express a wholly private notion and reflection. It is a mentalism-informed female self-recognition. If we think of truth as a political concept in a leftist scholarly way, then the creation of the female script is a search for truth through psychological, sensual, and experiential exploration of the self as truth within a predominantly female narrative text.

The cultural narrative of the female script is precisely this interweaving of collective and private narratives. Collective compositions by multiple people at cultural activities in important events, one-on-one exchanges as epistolary letters, and private compositions together comprise the main literary texts of the female script. The female script is a group culture shared by local women in Jiangyong, as well as used as a means of friendship and self-expression. What these three factors take on is the making of independence from the social subject's narrative (i.e., the male narrative) for the female narrative.

#### 4. The imageability of female script after its narratives

When examining female script creation, we observed that it leans more towards "song" than "poetry", with a flat, neat, and catchy style. This is complemented by singing recitation, which adds grace and elegance. Unlike ancient poems that often feature imagery<sup>1</sup> like "bright moon" and "candle fire," female calligraphers' texts predominantly mention character names such as "sister" and "parents" (Liming Zhao). While some may dismiss this observation as lacking literary research value, a closer look reveals that these texts possess inherent imageability, subtly evoking a sense of presence that lurks behind the words like a ghost<sup>2</sup>.

Analysing an excerpt from one such text, which reads:

今此三朝不同坐 / 只氣樓中無伴陪 / 雖然有朝轉回府 /  
氣日拆開一字難 / 只乙高親請放諒 / 細姊早回三兩朝 /  
不給放冷馳門府 / 我哭傷心你不聞 / 送出你門如刀割 /  
身坐冷樓眼淚飄

*"After these three days, there's no more shared time to-*

1 Imagery in Chinese is Yi Xiang, means "the combination of meaning and image". The following paragraphs will talk about it.

2 In Jacques Derrida's theory, ghost refers to the "unresolved past". In this paper, "ghost" refers to the fact that the text is not directly solved by image, but still gives readers a relatively special feeling.

*gether/cries since no companion in the room anymore/ although there is a day to return to the mansion/oh angeriness, the word that can't be separate into syllables/only hope that our elders give us mercy/you, my sister, please come back three or two days earlier/please don't leave this mansion with emptiness/I cry, the voice can't reach your ears/farewell sounds same as the sound of knife cutting my heart/sit in this deserted room with tears shedding out"*

We find repeated mentions of "tower," "mansion," and "door," coupled with the setting of the text, which directly transports us to the author's life space, often within the confines of a boudoir. In traditional Chinese poetics, imageability often appears metaphorically to express the aesthetic of the text, such as the farewell of willows or the homesickness of the moon. While Bi Xing (comparison and affective imageability) is less common in female script, as a form of documentary literature, its poetic logic is primarily narrative. However, this doesn't negate its ability to create imageability.

The text's imageability is rooted in "object images", such as the boudoir space. While a single image in female script may not convey much, the layering of these images creates a ghostly, evocative sense. The author terms this textual imageability "imageability."

Imageability in literature realizes the function of imagery without explicit images. In female script, repeated textual images construct the author's space, subtly placing the reader within the created literary world to evoke a spatial experience. This aligns with the personal experiences of women script creators, who, despite societal invisibility, expressed their depression through literature. In the process of fieldwork, we learned that many inheritors of women's calligraphy had shed tears because of appreciating women's calligraphy created by others, but we don't know why they shed tears, but "only after going through marriage and funeral can we understand", and most of them attribute this depression to "fate"<sup>3</sup>. Their sorrows, revolving around unspoken pain, transformed unconsciousness into text, inviting readers to share their emotional space.

Repeated emotions in storytelling are essential for imageability construction. In the text, words like "angeriness," "cry," "sad," and "cut" convey sadness and depression. Their repetition gives them meaning, reflecting personal emotional experiences rather than universal expressions. In female script, "Yi" (meaning) and "Xiang"(image) are distinct yet intertwined. "Xiang" constructs a holistic space through repetition, while "Yi" provides emotional

3 For details, see Appendix 1: oral history record and summary of important events of field investigation.

depth. The relationship between “Yi” and “Xiang” mirrors the connection between women’s pain as subjects and their confinement in physical and spiritual spaces. This dual plight of body and subject is the essence of female script imageability, linking individual experience, physical space, and emotional expression.

In the text of female script, “meaning” and “image” are separated. “Xiang” does not have a specific meaning, but it constructs a holistic space through repetition; “Meaning” has no corresponding symbol, but its repeated appearance also places readers’ reading experience in a relatively same feeling from beginning to end. Literature, as an art of time, the process of text repetition itself is a kind of extension and activity of difference - the construction of meaning can only be achieved through the interrelationship within the text organization with time as the order but cannot be completed by itself. The gap between “Yi” and “Xiang” as words does not separate them. On the contrary, it connects “meaning” and “image” together.

As in the former mentioned text, the reading experience brought by the imageability of female script is also very special compared with the direct image: the readers’ feelings for the author’s emotional expression are placed behind the text. This imageability that lingers behind the text constructs the aesthetical link between the text and the author’s life: in the pre-modern patriarchal society, women’s unconscious oppression is also wrapped around their bodies, and they are confined to the boudoir and the fields. The daily life and the slow and heavy pressure of the family put women’s lives under this pain. As female script reflects in literature, the pain caused by this kind of unknown pressure is closely related to the pain itself. The body and the subject are identical, and the perception edges of the pre-modern female’s body is the edge of boudoirs and the fields, and so is the pain of the subject. This relationship between body, space, and subjectivity is exactly the relationship between “Yi” and “Xiang” in the imagery of female script text: “Yi” is the pain that women as subjects feel, while “Xiang” is the space that women are trapped in as phenomena. Here, “Yi” and “Xiang” are connected by an individual experience. The construction of this individual experience in the real world and the plight of women in physical space and spirit are also the double plight of women’s body and subject. This is the way to establish the emotions and emotions behind the private female narrative in female scripts.

## 5. Female Narrative and Localization in Female Script

On February 4th, our research team arrived in Jiangyong and conducted an on-site inspection of Female Script cul-

ture in Jiangyong. During this field trip, we focused on studying and analysing the local characteristics of Female Script. Throughout the trip, we gained a basic understanding of the cultural geography, customs, and traditions of Jiangyong and conducted meticulous research on the culture of Female Script. Also, we recorded the oral history of Female Script from three Female Script inheritors.

湖 Jiangyong of Hunan Province is in the southern part of Yongzhou City, at the southern foot of Dupangling, adjacent to Jianghua Yao Autonomous County to the east, Fuchuan Yao Autonomous County to the south, Gongcheng Yao Autonomous County to the west, Guanyang County to the north, and Dao County to the northeast. Besides, it is 500 kilometres away from Guangzhou and 194 kilometres away from Guilin. Although located in Hunan province, its landscape is karst landforms. This special geographical environment of Jiangyong affects the creation of Female Script and female narratives profoundly.

### 5.1 The Impact of Natural Geography on Women’s Space

Jiangyong is rainy all year-round due to its geographical environment. Besides, coupled with the already rugged terrain, the roads in the area are very difficult for walking. According to our field research, people in Jiangyong consider “two to three kilometres” a long distance. Therefore, it can be inferred that in pro-modern times, traveling in this area should have been very difficult.

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Hence, the geographical environment of Jiangyong serves as a natural barrier between the female boudoir and the external world, trapping women’s bodies in the boudoir and limiting their activity space. This limitation builds up an absolute private space to local women that brings constraints Female Script creators, but it also provides them with a space for reflection.

We can see that in Female Script texts, spatial elements such as walls and rooms are repeatedly mentioned. This is because these elements are closely related to their daily life. And the imagery of “wall” is also commonly used in literature to express closure, isolation, and loneliness. As mentioned earlier, the creators of Female Script are not aware of the source of the distress expressed in their writings, so they ascribe the distress to their space that is limited.

As the composition of Female Script itself have possessed

strong boudoir resentment, Female Script, serving as a boudoir activity, naturally became a way for women to express themselves. At the same time, connecting the boudoir with women's own suffering is an important part of the female narrative in Female Script, because this private space of their boudoir provides a spatial narrative for women's personal experiences.

As mentioned earlier, the boudoirs provide women with a space to think about themselves: here, women are not gazed<sup>4</sup> upon by anyone else [the term gaze specifically refers to the concept of gaze in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of gaze]. This pure and private space for one's own provides women with a place to freely engage in Female Script creation, allowing them to express their emotions and even give vent to their negative feelings.

And it is precisely because of this, the creators are able to leave behind annoying stuff like dissatisfaction with their families, complaints about gender inequality, and even “妒忌姑婆真服气 (*the jealousy towards the goddess Gu Po but can do with nothing*)”, which showed negative attitudes towards gods.<sup>5</sup>

The natural geography of Jiangyong puts women under a restrictive physical space. And only in this very space, women can incorporate more authentic emotional expressions and personalized female narratives into Female Script.

### 5.2 The Relationship between Cultural Customs and Female Collective Narrative

Jiangyong has unique ancient Chinese (especially southern Chinese) wedding and funeral customs that are still preserved to today in some areas. Specifically, Female Script holds a significant position in wedding celebrations or funerals in Jiangyong. When a woman gets married, she usually engages in activities such as ZuoGeTang<sup>6</sup> and singing/dancing with friends and family before ceremony. The bride may also sing and learn more Female Script with her female friends and engage in DuiGe<sup>7</sup>. We speculate that this custom in Female Script culture may be caused by the cultural exchange of mixed ethnic mi-

4 the term gaze specifically refers to the concept of gaze in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of gaze

5 see Appendix 1: Oral History Records and Important Event Summary of Field Surveys for details

6 ZuoGeTang means that the bride answer questions from her female relatives about her impression of the groom, recall love experience, and share plans for the future.

7 One person performs on stage, commonly known as “ZuoTai”. The audience can freely go on stage to sing or DuiGe according to the content sung on stage, commonly known as “PeiTai”.

norities in the area based on limited research. In addition, another custom--the bride's sisters creating SanZhaoShu<sup>8</sup> for the bride was also popular in the past in Jiangyong. (ZhangManhua)

Moreover, the tradition of KuJia<sup>9</sup> is an important part of Chinese marriage customs. It is aimed at allowing women to express their reluctance to leave their original family, confusion about the future, and dissatisfaction with marriage. This seems to coincide with the usage of Female Script as a way to vent boudoir resentment. And Female Script, as a kind of “language” itself, has a function of dissemination. This gives the custom an irreplaceable role in related activities, namely marriage.

In the vast majority of China, the tradition of KuJia includes only the bride crying and singing, while in Jiangyong, this activity is further extended through various expressions of Female Script--the bride's sisters and friends from the same hometown will all participated in KuJia by participating in ZuoGeTang and writing SanZhaoShu. KuJia also provides a collectiveness of the expression of the mourning activities, which originally possesses performative acts with strong private characters performative acts with strong private characters<sup>10</sup>. For pro-modern women, marriage was considered their “top priority”. All women are required to marry into another family. So, the act of wedding provides a shared event for women's individual experiences. The role of Female Script in this event is precisely a way of connecting identities between female groups. And this is what is needed for women living in the boudoir for a long-term. The bond is not based on family relationships, but it's for a larger group and is established through cultural activities related to marriage and Female Script.

## 6. Conclusion

This article focuses on female script to explore the literary, local, personal, and collective nature of female narratives (collective and personal research sections). At the same time, there is not a significant amount of imagery used in female script, but the unconsciousness of the cre-

8 A Female Script work gifted to the bride on the third day after marriage, which is mainly based on the bride's past experiences and her sisterhood.

9 The crying and singing rituals performed by the bride at her wedding

10 here refers to the concept of performative in linguistic/philosophical theories from John Austin to Judith Butler. Performative activities refer to the activities in which people construct, maintain, and define their identity through language or behaviours in specific environments (mainly public, but can also be self-talk style performances).]

ator forms a connection between objects as spatial scenes and melancholic emotions naturally, generating the concept proposed in this article: “imageability” (localization research section).

Through this study, we believe that by using female script as the creation method, the literary creation of folk women can achieve self-empowerment. Regardless of its literary strength or the depth of expressed ideas, female folk creators attain self-expression through writing about real lives of themselves and those around them, providing meticulous feelings and understanding of their own situation, life, and emotions.

When we judge the literary value of a work, we more or less criticize it from an absolute literary discipline’s perspective as a serious work of literature. However, we can never ignore that anyone’s self-expression is of importance to the speaker themselves - they want others to hear their own voice. Since literary research in the 20th century where more focus was turned to the text, author studies has become increasingly scarce, to the extent that the academic community has paid less attention to the authors themselves. But when we face the literary research of folk women, the author’s creation is an essential object of our thinking. The literary expression of women is inherently a way for them to achieve self-empowerment, and in the academic community, female voices should also go beyond the text to be truly heard. Even after the “death of the author”, there is still, and always, a “birth of the author”.

Appendix: Oral History Records and Summary of Important Events of the Fieldwork

Before the Spring Festival of 2024, our research team conducted field research on the phenomenon of female script culture in the Jiangyong area. During this investigation, we were also fortunate enough to visit several female script witnesses and creators, and here we record their destinies intertwined with expression in the form of oral histories. We arrived in Jiangyong on February 4th and first visited the Female Script Museum, which has already become a scenic spot. The Garden of female scripts is adjacent to the Pu Bei Shu Cultural Village in Shangjiang Wei Township, Jiangyong County, Hunan Province. Inside the village, there are self-built houses as well as preserved houses, some of which have Spring Festival couplets written by women, and many children are playing with firecrackers in the hands of their neighbours and peers. Across the suspension bridge into the Female Script Museum will find the museum place is not big, only a black light of the cultural and creative store, crank up the female script School, and the back of the gallery of the pavilion is open to visitors.) Most of the other rooms are unlit, with a very primitive kitchen and a place for female script inheri-

tors to practice. The staff will gather visitors in the Female Script Calligraphy Hall to listen to Hu Meiyue’s lectures. Hu Meiyue’s grandmother, Gao Yinxian, was a famous female script inheritor. Influenced by her grandmother, she also learned female script at an early age and became a female script lecturer at a very young age. Most of the lecturers in the Female Script Museum are under her tutelage. In a short ten-minute lesson, she briefly introduces the nature of female script and teaches a song written by the female script about giving away marriages: “There’s a vine in the middle of the hall/Twelve tiers of flowers on the vine/The mother raised a golden lump of a woman/Double blowing and double hitting to give her away”. According to Hu Meiyue, marriage was seen as something to be celebrated in the era of the female script, so naturally there were more cheerful songs about giving away marriages. At the same time, however, the female script also reveals a certain ambivalence. In those days, accusations of fate and fear of marriage often appeared in the form of songs about crying marriage.

The docent then led us through the entire exhibition, including the origins and development of female scripts, as well as specific collections of codices. Most of the creators of female script were women with three-inch golden lilies who were able to learn and practice female script due to the relative wealth of their families and the limitations of their physical space. Other women who worked and did not have their feet wrapped were mostly able to chant and not write. Putting aside the realities of time, the specificity of female script creators also suggests a causal relationship between women’s creativity and the limitations of physical space. Before ending our day of exploration, we had a chat with the docent. She mentioned that she had not enjoyed female scripts earlier in her life and was not really interested in teaching them to her offspring. In her words, “female script is just a part of life for the locals, we are all used to seeing it there is no study or not.” The transmission of female script in contemporary times has been divorced from the regional and contemporary context of the time, and its truly subversive value has been left in the past along with it.

Afterwards, the research team met with Hu Xin, made an appointment in advance, at the Female Script Museum, and the venue for the conversation was still chosen to be the female script Academy. Hu Xin is a native of Pumei Village, and later became an inheritor of the female script. She has participated in many events such as fairs and expositions and is responsible for docking tourists. She told us that she has been interested in music since she was a child and won the first prize in music in elementary school. Hu Xin’s mother was very interested in female

script and often practiced calligraphy or sang female script at home. Under the influence of her family, Hu Xin learned to sing songs from the female script at a very young age. However, it was only after she came to the Female Script Museum to work as a ticket taker that she really began to learn systematically. Because of her love for her family, Hu Xin didn't leave her hometown to work after graduating from high school like other young people of her age; instead, she chose to work as a ticket taker in the Female Script Museum. However, in the process of chatting with foreign tourists, she slowly felt the meaning behind the female scripts and began to sink her heart into the study of female scripts. During this process, she studied with Ms. Hu Meiyue, a teacher in the Female Script Museum. Because Hu Xin was a bit of a loner, it was difficult for her to make true friends at the beginning of her career at the Female Script Museum. Hu Xin feels that "the essence of female scripts is to build bonds and bring together women who share a similar spirit of self-improvement". She says that most of her most important friends in life have their roots in female scripts, and that they sometimes give each other gifts, such as paintings and calligraphy, in exchange for New Year's gifts. Hu Xin's most impressive collection of female scripts is the Seven Sisters written by Yi Nianhua. From ancient times to the present, female scripts seem eternally entwined with expression and friendship.

The texts of female scripts are full of depictions of resistance to marriage and crying for marriage. In fact, most of these texts are tools for self-persuasion and self-exclusion, and a real revolution against marriage has never occurred in Jiangyong. They cry for the future, for their parents, for their fate, but they rarely blame men or marriage. When describing loneliness, lines such as "I often shed tears in my dreams, thinking that I was poorly blessed in my past life" recur. The sentence "I think I was not lucky in my past life." is repeated. The source of all suffering in the female scripts is attributed to "fate" and a kind of established unknowability. Instead of being a literature, the female script is a tool. Its most important value is to prove that even the most uninformed person can have a clear sense of pain, loneliness, and freedom. And even the loneliest people will want to express themselves.

On the side of the female script School is a statue of a female deity. According to Hu Xin, this is Auntie Huashan, who, according to legend, is a respected woman who also writes female scripts. In the spring, women would often go to the Huashan Temple to worship her, and the image of Auntie Huashan in the temple was that of a pair of inseparable sisters. However, after the liberation from national crisis, the worship activities gradually disap-

peared. This may have been due to the fading of the custom because of the changing times, but Hu Xin believes that the root of the problem is that female scripts are "an extremely local culture". Along with the disappearance of Huashan Auntie, there is also a change in the practice of female scripts. Today, women's writing does not have the same environment as it did back then, and is used less in life, while changes in social production relations have led to the loss of the soil for women to produce women's writing. The main theme of female scripts is marriage, and the custom of marriage is disappearing with the change of time. Nowadays, women's need for self-expression cannot and need not depend on an original language.

Through Docent Hu Xin, we learned that He Yanxin, the last natural inheritor of the female script, lives in He Yuan village, and after a phone call, we made an appointment for the afternoon of the third day. Before heading to He Yuan village, we went to Xia Wan village, where it was said that a woman's script inheritor named Zhou Huijuan also lived. Xiawan Village is very modern, and we contacted Zhou Huijuan through the neighborhood committee and went to her home. Zhou Huijuan is the first generation of female script teachers at the Female Script Museum, while her brother was one of the first experts to study female script. She participated in the Shanghai Expo in '04 and has now created more than forty works in female script. Zhou Huijuan lost her mother at a young age. Her elder sister loved her and brought her to her side, but she unexpectedly died in childbirth. She returned to her father's home but lost him in middle school. As a member of a family of female script writers, Zhou Huijuan was taught female script by her elder sister and aunt. After her elder sister's death, Zhou Huijuan, like countless other women in history, helped her sister burn the collection of female scripts she had during her lifetime and accompanied her sister on her last journey. With such a tragic childhood experience, the first time she really put pen to paper, she wrote on the theme of paying tribute to her father and reminiscing of her mother. During that period of her youth, the female scripts carried a great deal of her memories. For example, her spring trip to Huashan Temple was written as "If Auntie shows her spirit again, she should keep the world safe. Jealous of Auntie's true conviction, she can receive incense for ten thousand years." Zhou Huijuan's unreserved sharing of her jealousy of the gods shows the private expression of her strong emotions in her compositions. During the Cultural Revolution, she chose not to care about women's writing, putting away the female scripts in her home and pretending not to know them. It was only when experts came to do research after liberation that the past writings were finally "uncovered."

Although her family was open-minded enough to support her study of Chinese characters after liberation, they still chose an arranged marriage for her. Zhou Huijuan initially resisted the idea, but after much deliberation and hesitation, she agreed. Decades later, she has raised four children. However, few of her children know how to write female scripts, and only one of her daughters has recently developed a sudden interest in the art, which is a dilemma for the heritage of female scripts. According to Zhou Huijuan, she has made many friends because of female scripts. For example, she met He Yanxin at the Female Script Museum in her early years, and after He Yanxin's son died of liver cancer in 18 years, Zhou Huijuan put pen to paper and wrote a letter of advice on female scripts to her. Recalling all the female scripts she has written in her life, Zhou Huijuan said, "female scripts are a collection of joys and sorrows. When I was young, I sang and danced, and everyone was happy. But when you are older, you have to do women's red, and you are sad when you get married, and when the daughter-in-law has a bad relationship with her mother-in-law, you are also sad in secret, and you can't let others know about it."

After liberation, female scripts became her livelihood, because of the work of the Female Script Museum and to assist the schedule of scholars from around the world, she and her family lived in a rural self-built house. Then later, Zhou Huijuan took more than a week to complete the female script manuscript "Ode to the Red Flag" scroll dedicated to the 20th Party Congress. The change of times has made her write less about her life experiences, and instead embrace the new life she has gained because of women's writing.

After interviewing Zhou Huijuan, we contacted Ms. He Yanxin and drove to He Yuan village. He Yanxin hadn't written a female script in more than ten years, and her six children had all grown up and settled in other countries. She grew up in her grandmother's house, where she first became acquainted with female scripts. Her grandmother was a respected gentleman's daughter, her family was relatively wealthy, her husband was a scholar, and she herself was a teacher of female script. However, He Yanxin's deepest impression of her grandmother was the tears she shed when she was writing the Sanchao Shu for the women who were getting married in the village. In the Sanchao book (a book written in women's characters and given to the bride by her sisters and female relatives and friends from her mother's family three days after her marriage), the female relatives and friends would often write down the bride's biography at the end and then sob uncontrollably. Since she was a child, He Yanxin knew that female scripts were full of tears, but never really understood

why they were so painful. Occasionally, when her grandmother's eyes became blurry from crying, she would help her grandmother with the copying process. It wasn't until she reached the age of maturity, when He Yanxin was forced by her parents to marry someone she didn't really know, that she understood the vague hatred and those deep pains in the female script. She says, "It was pure oppression, and now after decades I still can't tell you what it was like." For years after her marriage, she never had any real interaction with her husband. It wasn't until her husband's death in '97 that she shed her first tears for him. Strictly speaking, however, these tears were not shed for him, but for her own misery.

He Yanxin's view of female scripts is also very different from that of the inheritors of the Female Script Museum. The song for the bridegroom, Jintuo Nu, which was once judged by the inheritors of the Female Script Museum to be "joyful," is indeed a sad song in He Yanxin's eyes, so sad that it could not be any sadder. What she hears in the song is the separation from parents and the wasted time of a lifetime. She believes that female scripts are downright sad literature, and that what lies beneath the joyful tunes is unspeakable pain and sorrow. So, she celebrates and supports the demise of female scripts. In her eyes, this is probably the sad demise of women.

After bidding farewell to He Yanxin, we learned in Jingtian Village that there is another elderly person who teaches female scripts in the new era. Her name is Mo Cuifeng and she is a teacher of female scripts in Jingtian Village. Her knowledge of female script was taught by her mother, so it is strong and solid. She remembers singing women's songs with her mother when she was a child, sitting in song halls and gathering with other girls to learn. As an adult, she was extremely resistant to the husband her parents forced her to marry, believing him to be "sloppy", "uneducated", and "illiterate". On the other hand, she falls in love with a man who wants to be free to fall in love but is "educated" and "has potential". Mo Cui Feng has its own dignity, she even once wrote a withdrawal post, but still to no avail. And then. Because of the Cultural Revolution, most of the words she had written were burned, and her family was torn apart. It was only when the female script began to develop again that she picked up this text that she had once written down her heart. Not only did she write it herself, but she was also happy to teach it to others. One by one, ten by ten, she soon became the authoritative female script teacher in the village and had many disciples.

Huashan Temple: The Huashan Temple in Shexia Village, Jiangyong County, is the last Auntie Temple left in the Jiangyong area. Walking up the hill along the mountain



road, it doesn't take long to spot the temple nestled half-way up the hill. The temple is dedicated to the two Tan sisters, who became immortals by sitting in the temple, however, the incense has been broken and the food offered is old. The plaques around the temple are all written in female script, the exact meaning of which is unknown.

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