

The “Gender” Siege: Female Images in Qian Zhongshu’s Novel “Fortress Besieged”

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Abstract:

“Fortress Besieged” by Qian Zhongshu is known as the “New Scholar” in the history of modern literature. The “Scholar World” depicted by Qian Zhongshu is a shining pearl in the literary world. The description of female images is even more intriguing and impressive. It presents the light ahead of female consciousness and the deep-rooted traces of male consciousness. This collision between the old and the new gives this work unique literary and time value. Starting from the typical female images in “Fortress Besieged,” combining the original text and creative background, this paper explores the sparks between new ideas and deep-rooted patriarchal consciousness, which expands the analysis path of the male perspective for analyzing the shaping of female roles. Considering the female situation in modern society, it is concluded that the profundity of novel ideas has a positive role and significance for today’s women to strive for social status and discourse power.

Keywords: Female image; Fortress Besieged; male chauvinism.

1. Introduction

“Fortress Besieged” is a novel with a unique style written by Qian Zhongshu, which enjoys a high reputation in the history of modern literature in China [1]. It is a “new scholar’s history” formed by the author’s “hard work.” “The novel’s characters are vivid, leaving a deep impression on thousands of readers. In particular, female roles such as Su Wenwan, Tang Xiaofu, Sun Roujia, and Miss Bao are the products of the special times. However, due to the particularity of the times, modern women with new ideas can never escape the prejudice from the patriarchal consciousness.

The topic of gender has always been an eternal hot topic, and the new progressive ideas collided with the deep-rooted male chauvinism in “Fortress Besieged,” giving this work an extraordinary color. Wei Yong of Jilin Normal University, from the perspective of gender, analyzes the female characters from the perspective of female vision and male prejudice, reveals the wrong view of male prejudice on women’s words and deeds in the novel, re-examines the female images, and draws the conclusion that female consciousness has not been substantially respected [2]. Meng Ke of Lanzhou Jiaotong University analyzes the four main female characters in the novel from four aspects: social and cultural background, character, character status, and living environment, and examines the profundity of their ideological character, which reveals the rea-

sons for the tragedy of intellectual women in ideological liberation and provides some references for the survival and development of modern women [3].

Based on predecessors’ research, this paper uses case studies and comparative analysis, combining the author of the work and the background of the times, and deeply analyzes the progressive thoughts and the prejudice shackles given to each female role in “Fortress Besieged.” “At the same time, this paper discusses the various factors of female image formation and the artistic charm brought by the collision of old and new ideas, aiming at exploring the enlightenment of “Fortress Besieged” on today’s gender dilemma. Through the in-depth analysis of the novel, the study presents readers with the profound gender observation and social thinking contained in this literary work.

2. Women’s Liberation Consciousness in the New Era

“Fortress Besieged,” as a product of the May 4th Movement, has an inseparable relationship with the new enlightenment. Literary creation is often closely related to social trends. The self-awareness and female wisdom in the book make this work resonate with readers at the tip of social waves.

2.1 Appearance Changes and Liberation

Miss Bao, Su Wenwan, and Tang Xiaofu have appearance characteristics, and different surface characteristics imply

the same tendency toward progressive spirit and liberation consciousness. Miss Bao's role is bold, and her "frivolous" attitude is prominent in her dress. "Crimson-colored tube top," "sea blue flesh-attached shorts," and "painted nails" all reflect Miss Bao's inner rebellious consciousness. According to the description of Su Wenwan's appearance in the original text, it can be seen that in the author's pen, she is a fashionable new-style woman who pursues cultural and spiritual life and attaches importance to dressing. She has a different ideological tendency and spiritual world from traditional women, exuding the vitality and brilliance of new-style women. The depiction also reveals her being "self-sustaining and characteristicslofty," which differs from the follow-up stories. Exquisite pen and ink outlined the specific image of new women in this period, and Su Wenwan was the ultimate representative of this image.

Tang Xiaofu is what the author calls a rare 'real woman' in modern civilized society. The novel shows her sweetness and innocence with a wonderful, incoherent portrait description [4]. The author describes Tang Xiaofu's appearance in detail. "Her hair is not permed, her eyebrows are not tweezers, and her lipstick is not rubbed. It seems that she is at ease, able to abide by the natural difficulties and not to make up for the shortcomings of nature." It is not that Tang Xiaofu does not know fashion and trends, but her relatively simple external choices reflect her strong personal consciousness and unique aesthetic attitude.

Compared with other female characters, Sun Roujia's appearance is plain. However, she also has the flavor of urbanization: "He thought it was enough to wash her face, so he turned around and found her looking in the small mirror, painting her lips with powder...The face she usually thought was unadorned became a work of art". It is revealed that Sun Roujia also attaches importance to appearance modification and has the characteristics of a new female image that keeps up with the trends of the times.

2.2 Strong Self-Awareness in Love

The novel shows the advanced love views of various female characters from many angles. Different from traditional women, the attitudes of female characters in "Fortress Besieged" are mostly brave, bold, and active. Still, they do not lose their dignity and radiate the light of women's self-awareness in the new era.

Su Wenwan's attitude towards love is sincere, and she is willing to control her love destiny. Faced with many excellent suitors, Su Wenwan would rather follow her heart and choose Fang Hongjian, who is inferior, and take the initiative to express her love, sending a close signal to Fang Hongjian to deal with him emotionally. Even after discovering Fang Hongjian's true thoughts, he did not continue to indulge in this insincere love but immediately turned his attention to others so as not to spend too much

on his doomed emotions. It can be seen that Su Wenwan is brave and rational when treating love.

"When it comes to love, she can take the initiative to fight for it, free from the control and arrangement of family and social thoughts at that time [5]." As Su Wenwan's cousin, Tang Xiaofu is also brave and bold in treating love and an idealist. Under the background of that time, Tang Xiaofu's emancipating mind and personal consciousness were more vivid and intense, which was worthy of being a rarity in modern civilized society. "The person I love, I want to occupy his whole life. Before he met me, he had no past and left a blank waiting for me [1]." Influenced by the idealized fantasy of love, naive Tang Xiaofu was deeply attracted by Fang Hongjian's pursuit. Such a lingering affair made her addicted. She yearned for beauty and was willing to strive for it. Although the story between Tang Xiaofu and Fang Hongjian doesn't have a happy ending, throughout the process, she always expresses her feelings fearlessly and bravely pursues her ideal of free love.

As a female character who realizes love, Sun Roujia has her loveliness and uniqueness. For Fang Hongjian, she plays hard to get and uses some tricks to melt his heart and draw him closer to herself. Sun Roujia is the most active in the game of love. However, one party's positive action is often needed at the story's beginning. As a woman, she bravely pursues love with novel methods. She is a new woman who yearns for love and is willing to put it into action.

2.3 Outstanding Talent and Wisdom

The female characters in "Fortress Besieged" are full of wisdom and talent, and their educational experience is the source of their progressive thoughts. Su Wenwan returns from studying abroad. Unlike Fang Hongjian, she is a veritable female doctor and a well-deserved intellectual woman. Cousin Tang Xiaofu's father is a legal adviser. Born in a scholarly family, she is also influenced by books. From an emotional understanding, we can see that foreign classics deeply influences her, and at the same time, she is a rational, intellectual woman. Although Sun Roujia was born into a middle-class family, she is also an intellectual woman with outstanding talents. She can cope freely in San Lv University, a mixed place of good and evil. She has an enterprising spirit and communication skills superior to other roles, highlighting Sun Roujia's independent and brilliant modern female character.

3. The Shackles Given by Male Chauvinism

The author's portrayal of various female images shows the pursuit of free love by female characters. It reflects the prejudice against this character and thought through the description of male characters, which implies the

deep-rooted prejudice consciousness against women [6]. In his choice of emotional objects, Fang Hongjian can see that in getting along with women. He unconsciously materializes the women around him and always holds a double-standard attitude toward women's behavior.

3.1 Materialization of Female Images

Miss Bao, in Fang Hongjian's view, is a "slutty" woman because she has a fiancé and acts boldly. Therefore, Fang Hongjian's attitude towards her is casual and casual, and she should only be regarded as a dew love on a long journey, so she is not responsible. Even if she knows that Miss Bao has a fiancé, he wants to have this fun feeling.

Compared with the dissolute Miss Bao, the pure and lovely Tang Xiaofu became the target of Fang Hongjian's choice. In the traditional concept, women always have an inseparable relationship with virtue, a label that women have never been able to tear off for thousands of years. Therefore, Tang Xiaofu, a pure and unadorned woman, is a role played with a positive image in the author's pen, becoming a woman that Fang Hongjian chooses to pursue with sincerity, and especially pities the emotional connection with chastity women. Comparing the two female roles, different attitudes and extreme evaluations undoubtedly classify the two female roles separately, which can be described as "moon trouble." It is mean to think that "dissolute" women cannot be treated sincerely, while "pure" women should have a good ending. Superficial and ignoring the complexity of human nature, from the shaping of roles to plot design, is not a kind of materialization of women.

3.2 "Victim" Attitude towards Double Standards

Su Wenwan is a woman who bravely follows her inner choice and holds a sincere attitude toward her feelings. However, according to the description in the original text, Su Wenwan was vain and ridiculous in her feelings and was laughed at for being "romantic" and "not allowed to love," which was considered embarrassing and unbearable. However, in other details, we can see that Su Wenwan is sincere to Fang Hongjian but has no affection for Zhao Xinmei, who is eager to pursue, and this sincerity is regarded as a shame as a woman, a prejudice against women.

What's more, Fang Hongjian regarded her as the "murderer" who led to his failure with Tang Xiaofu, but in fact, Su Wenwan only told Tang Xiaofu the truth. Fang Hongjian blamed the kiss with Su Wenwan on "the disaster caused by the moon," indicating that the kiss contained no sincerity and was not responsible. However, his behavior undoubtedly gave Su Wenwan emotional hope and made her misunderstand deeper and deeper. Unfair, Fang Hongjian's erratic and irresponsible behavior was not criticized at all.

In this relationship, Fang Hongjian has always appeared as a "victim." In the book, Su Wenwan is blamed for all the faults and is not even given a chance to argue. This is an unfair treatment of women in a patriarchal society and a narrow "victim" imagination.

Looking at Sun Roujia again, in "Fortress Besieged," she is portrayed as a woman full of calculation and good at the layout, which is also mentioned in Zhao Xinmei's mouth many times to inform and warn Fang Hongjian. At the time of the engagement, the article describes how Sun Roujia played some tricks to facilitate this marriage. But Sun Roujia is just a girl who yearns for beautiful love and is a little shy. She longs to have a relationship with Fang Hongjian. She unconsciously reveals her true feelings while getting along and is ashamed to express them before using some skills. In the feudal, patriarchal civilized society, women actively pursue men, which violates the traditional pursuit relationship of women as the object and men as the main body, so it is against the rules for women to express their desires.

Moreover, the author thinks Sun Roujia's behavior belongs to scheming, which is disgusting and unbearable. This is also a kind of bondage and shackles brought to women by the male gaze. Prejudice and stereotypes tightly wrap up Sun Roujia. Everything described by the author, from their acquaintance to their marriage, puts Fang Hongjian in a passive "victim" position, which is a prejudice against women from a male perspective.

4. Inspiration from Collision Sparks

For thousands of years, in China's traditional male knowledge system, represented by Confucian culture, men in society have established a gender system with their interests and values. From "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" to "Seven Rules," the whole society has used various behavioral restrictions and ideological indoctrination to educate and discipline women. Today, the sense of male rights is still deeply rooted, which is an unshakable fact [7].

From the social background, "Fortress Besieged" was written in the forties before the founding of New China. In this time and space, the old and new ideas collided. Compared with before, the status of women has improved, but there is still a lack of social recognition. The fact that women's awakening and liberation only exist in a small group of people, and their strength is still inferior to that of a patriarchal society, is deeply rooted and cannot be shaken. Therefore, the female images in "Fortress Besieged" have been weakened, which is the inherent prejudice against women in the patriarchal society. This consciousness has a far-reaching influence, so it cannot completely erase the traces. Even in the new century, the male consciousness is still inseparable and cannot get rid of the shackles of social background. Literary creation

comes from real life, so the shaping of female roles in the article can only be locked with social inequality.

From a personal point of view, Qian Zhongshu's numerous dialogues and psychological descriptions in "Fortress Besieged" are quite realistic. The women in the book are vividly portrayed, and his creation would not be so successful without careful observation of the women around him. It can be seen that Qian Zhongshu has stored a lot of in-depth thinking about women. Even so, male writers' views on women will inevitably bear the brand of the times, and sometimes there may be some bias, which is inevitable for male writers [8]. As a male writer, Qian Zhongshu is always bound by the gender perspective when portraying female roles. Both her superficial personal views and her subconscious mind, like an iceberg hidden under the sea, contain rules and regulations that restrict real women. Therefore, the creation of "Fortress Besieged" cannot perfectly consider the perspective of both sexes, and it cannot escape the conceptual limitations revealed by the inherent gender.

The creation of literature reflects real life to a certain extent, and the creation background of "Fortress Besieged" is in a special period of alternation between old and new. There is an unusual spark between women's consciousness and men's gaze. Whether the story itself is expounded or the author's subconscious mind, it reflects an era problem: it still takes time for women to fully awaken, and there is still a long way to go. The so-called "complete" awakening of women not only refers to women's ideological emancipation but also includes men's recognition and respect, including the acceptance and tolerance of the whole society. Even after nearly a century, the status quo of female roles in "Fortress Besieged" is similar to that of women in today's society. The heavy shackles may no longer be exposed, but they never leave women's ankles. This is a constraint, a burden, and a thornbush that hinders the development of the times. The road of women's awakening is full of mud, wind and rain, snowstorms, prejudice, and stereotypes still exist. Women cannot escape and stop.

Under the current social environment, modern women should realize that men and women are equal in love. Both sides can pursue ideal emotional relations and choose their objects. At the same time, they should maintain care and tolerance for each other in the relationship and fully respect their personality and independent thoughts. It is the most important matter to develop independent thinking.

5. Conclusion

"Fortress Besieged" is an ordinary and eye-catching orchid in the contemporary barren garden, and every word and sentence contains a complicated life [9]. The female

images in the novels have their characteristics. They pursue the value of life and the ideal life in the new era, leaving traces of new ideas and patriarchal consciousness. In the 1930s and 1940s, old China, a society with strong feudal remnants, took the lead in tasting the ups and downs, but it is not difficult to find that it seems that it will take some time for intellectual women to realize a perfect self freely [10].

This paper analyzes the bright spots of women's progressive thought from two aspects: women's new thought and male prejudice, reveals the influence of male prejudice on women, and explores the reasons behind it. The successful portrayal of four female characters in "Fortress Besieged" can be said to have greatly improved the novel's literary value and demonstrated the author Qian Zhongshu's unique ability to express the psychological and interpersonal relationships of the characters. This work still enlightens society today. It is not only an inspiration to women in their careers, marriage, and family but also a vivid display of the dilemma of gender opposition. The hidden prejudice consciousness against women reminds the public to make ideological changes to some extent.

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