

# Urban Women's Writing in the Revolutionary Wave—a Counter-Reading of the “Eclipse” Trilogy and “Song of Youth”

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**Abstract.** There are obvious differences between the left-wing literature of the 1930s and the revolutionary literary works after the founding of New China in the 1950s. Among the many works, the "Eclipse" trilogy and "Song of Youth" are the few works that develop plots with women as the center. By reading these two works, we can have a more comprehensive understanding of the revolutionary trends in the 1930s and 1950s, and it is also conducive to studying the status of women and the development of female literature in the two periods.

## 1. Introduction

With the outbreak of the Revolution of 1911 and the May Fourth Movement, China began to awaken and innovate in various fields, and women were no exception. It can be said that the feminist movement and the Chinese revolution were carried out almost at the same time. However, with the failure of the revolution, the feminist movement was also marginalized, and female revolutionary leaders turned to cooperate with the more revolutionary party—the Communist Party of China. The Chinese Communist Party was also keenly aware of the importance of women's liberation. Therefore, Women's activities during the Great Revolution and beyond were not purely feminist movements, but more of an accessory to China's new democratic revolution. [1,10]

Mao Zedong classified intellectuals and other classes that occupied a small amount of the means of production as the petty bourgeoisie. They were the centrists and targets of China's new democratic revolution. Therefore, compared with the workers and peasants, the petty bourgeoisie's own contradictions make literary works centered on them more dramatic. Urban women such as Lin Daojing and Ms. Jing are representative images of petty bourgeois intellectuals.[4]

## 2. Different Perspectives of Male and Female Writers

In the "Eclipse" trilogy, due to the male identity of the author Mr. Mao Dun, it is naturally inevitable to "other" women. The women in the work are not only the vassals of the revolution, but also the vassals of men. In "Shake", the ambiguity between Sun Wuyang and Fang Luolan is to highlight the weakness of Fang Luolan's petty bourgeoisie and the wavering caused by the revolutionary process. Zhang Qiuli's passion is a trend and fashion popular during the May Fourth period, and it is just to

show the sinking and confusion of progressive young people after the failure of the Great Revolution. As for Ms. Hui, who claims to be passionate in order to take revenge on men, in the final analysis, she is also helpless after being molested by men.[5]

The female images in the "Eclipse" trilogy are often divided into two types. One is the traditional conservative female image, represented by Mrs. Fang. They are naturally the ideal images of women imagined and written by male writers. They are weak, beautiful, considerate, and have almost perfect qualities, but they are always the vassals of men. The other type is the progressive women represented by Sun Wuyang, Zhang Qiuli and Ms. Hui. They no longer stick to feudal etiquette and dogma, but strive to put themselves on an equal footing with men. However, these progressive women resist The means and goals of patriarchy are to imitate men and become men, which is completely different from the truly independent women described by female writers.

In "Song of Youth", Lin Daojing's relationship with three men successively puts the subject on the woman herself, with the men only guiding and helping. When Lin Daojing was in poverty, Yu Yongze solved her food and clothing problem; when Lin Daojing faced a crisis of faith, Lu Jiachuan guided her to the road of revolution; after Lu Jiachuan was arrested and sacrificed, Jiang Hua took over as the revolutionary guide Responsibility eventually cultivated Lin Daojing into an excellent revolutionary fighter.

On the one hand, at the beginning of the story, Lin Daojing's melody was "escape". She escaped from her feudal family. After receiving help from Yu Yongze, she found that she still had not escaped from Yu Yongze's shackles, so she chose to escape again. Lin Daojing's "escape" is a resistance to the reality of women being oppressed. Similarly, Ms. Hui in "Disillusionment" also encounters obstacles on the road to independent survival. Lin Daojing's resistance and Ms. Hui's sinking

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compromise form a distinct contrast. Later, with the help of Lu Jiachuan and Jiang Hua, Lin Daojing embarked on the road of revolution and successfully led the revolution. Although Lin Daojing escaped from the cruel old society, she still could not avoid the guidance and help of men on the road to true independence.

### 3. Similarities and Differences in Female Images

Different from contemporary feminist literature by writers such as Wang Anyi and Tie Ning, the female images in the "Eclipse" trilogy and "Song of Youth" ultimately serve the revolution. The only female perspective narrative in the trilogy is "Disillusionment", in which Ms. Jing has many similarities and differences with Lin Daojing. Although the two were caught up in the wave of the May Fourth Movement, they still could not escape the oppression of their patriarchal families. Ms. Jing's mother told her to stay safe, and she became even more worried after hearing Ms. Hui's rumors; Lin Daojing's parents were standard feudal parents who objectified women, and all their training for her was to sell her at a good price.

Mao Dun and Yang Mo are completely different in their handling of relationships with men. Ms. Jing admires Qiang and is subordinate to men. When faced with the strong officer who takes pleasure in war, she tries to use love to change his pleasure. Lin Daojing did not surrender to other men. Yu Yongze saved her life, but she was still unwilling to be controlled by Yu. Lu Jiachuan and Jiang Hua redeemed her spirit and led her to the road of revolution. She worked hard to learn and progress, just for being able to stand with the two of them equally.

Regarding sexual concepts, male writers also showed misunderstandings of female sexual concepts. Mao Dun describes how when Ms. Jing discovers Bao Su's true identity, she suffers from the fact that her virginity has been tarnished. Lin Daojing and Yu Yongze lived together and then broke up. She was only angry at Yu Yongze's hypocrisy, but did not mention a word about her chastity. Another example is Ms. Shafei written by Ding Ling, Wang Qiyao in "Song of Everlasting Sorrow"; and many female writers' female images, which do not emphasize or care about the so-called "chastity".[3]

Beauvoir believes that an important reason for women to become the "second sex" is economic independence. [2,11] In the "Eclipse" trilogy and "Song of Youth", the author has noticed this keenly. After Ms. Hui returned from studying abroad, she encountered obstacles in finding a job. Her brother took pleasure in her misfortune and was happy to support her sister; Lin Daojing never gave up the idea of financial independence after living together with Yu Yongze, even though Yu Yongze opposed and obstructed her many times. Without financial resources, it is far more difficult for women to join the revolution than for men.

In the "Eclipse" trilogy and "Song of Youth", there is a negative typical female image respectively. Lu Meili in "Shake" is gentle, virtuous, and dedicated to playing the role of Mrs. Fang. She has been in love with Fang Luolan since childhood, and they have a deep relationship as

husband and wife. However, this traditional female image was completely defeated by the progressive woman Sun Wuyang. After Fang Luolan met Sun Wuyang, she left Lu Meili behind. After the May 4th Movement, traditional women like Lu Meili were destined to be eliminated by the times. In "Song of Youth", Bai Liping was once a progressive young man who actively participated in the student movement and was aggrieved by the September 18th Incident. However, when Lin Daojing saw Bai Liping again, she had become a social butterfly in the dance hall. He mingled among the so-called upper class society and even wanted to introduce Lin Daojing to other dignitaries. The two female figures, Lu Meili and Bai Liping, stand on opposite sides of the two identities of progressive women during the May Fourth period. Lu Meili stood on the opposite side of women - men, while Bai Liping stood on the opposite side of revolution - reactionary. This also shows once again that whether it is from the front or the back, the two identities that the women in the two works have at the same time - women and revolutionaries are equally important.

### 4. Love, Revolution, Gender

Beauvoir once commented on the female images of many male writers. Although they are extremely beautiful and are everything to men, they are not themselves.[2] These women are all vassals of men. As a male writer, Mr. Mao Dun naturally cannot escape his narrow prejudice against women. There are two types of female images in the "Eclipse" trilogy. One is passionate women like Sun Wuyang, Ms. Hui, and Zhang Qiuliu, and the other is women like Ms. Jing who try to break the shackles of tradition and find her own direction in life. They were revolutionary and progressive, but in the end they were still restrained by men.

The appearance of Sun Wuyang was to promote the conflict between Fang Luolan and Mrs. Fang. As a typical representative of progressive young women during the May Fourth period, she was progressive, open-minded, and devoted to the revolution, which formed a clear contrast with Mrs. Fang's traditional family-centered woman image. Compared. But Sun Wuyang still cannot get rid of the female image portrayed by male stereotypes. Similar to Flaubert's Emma and Tolstoy's Anna, they are both wandering between an increasingly open and inclusive world and the traditional old forces in the era of bourgeois revolution. contradictory images. Mrs. Fang, on the other hand, is a standard image of a family woman in traditional feudal society who abides by women's ethics and obeys the three obediences and four virtues. This is the standard and perfect woman favored by male writers.

Ms. Hui showed mercy at all times, just to take revenge on the men who had hurt her. In Mr. Mao Dun's "Eclipse" trilogy, the portrayal of women is still inseparable from the description of male love and female love, and this kind of male love and female love is often under the male perspective. Ms. Hui was hurt by a man because of emotional inequality; when she took revenge on a man, she also took advantage of the gender inequality between men and women. Even though she longs to be

independent, she still finds it difficult to move forward without being dependent on a man. The tragedy of Ms. Hui lies in the male trap that she can never escape from.

Zhang Qiuliu was intoxicated in the love between men and women, but ended up suffering from illness. As the only woman among the many failed revolutionaries in "The Pursuit", she chose to indulge in the love between men and women to escape reality. But for male revolutionaries, love is just a seasoning that comes and goes away. For Zhang Qiuliu, once he falls in love, he can no longer escape and is trapped by his feelings for life, ending up like this.

Ms. Jing is different from the first three. On the one hand, she pursues revolution, but on the other hand, she is willing to submit to men. At school, she opposed the student movement that only talked empty words and longed to do something practical, but she could not refuse the pursuit of her classmates. After being disappointed by her classmates, she devoted herself to the revolution, but fell in love with a soldier again. After the soldiers left, she once again joined the revolution. In the end, both the dream of love and the dream of revolution came to disillusionment.

Therefore, the women in Mr. Mao Dun's works serve the revolution and men, but have lost the charm of women themselves.

The heroine Lin Daojing in "Song of Youth" has distinct feminist liberation characteristics while pursuing revolution. She escapes twice in the novel, one is to escape from her family by taking a train, and the other is to escape from Yu Yongze's control and join the revolution. Lin Daojing's first escape is very similar to the escape of "Nora" in various Chinese and foreign works. They yearn for freedom and have the courage to practice it. They are representatives of bourgeois progressive women. Lin Daojing's second escape was a classic question that has troubled literati since the May Fourth Movement - what happened to Nora after she left, and she gave her own answer.[6] After escaping from the new shackles, Lin Daojing chose to join the revolution, liberating herself and liberating more people. As a revolutionary novel with a clear political stance, "Song of Youth" finally leads the issue of women's liberation to the issue of revolution.[9]

When Yang Mo himself portrayed Lin Daojing's image, he also focused on describing her characteristics as a woman.

"Jing, I have grown up so much - I am twenty-nine years old. This is the first time that I am good to you. Except when I was a child, my mother is like you... So, I am willing to use my heart and my feelings I came to make you happy, to make you happy... But, I'm sorry for you, I feel very uneasy, I gave you too little."

The relationship between Jiang Hua and Lin Daojing has always been interpreted as (party) father/daughter, (male) initiate/initiate. However, looking at Jiang Hua's dependence on Lin Daojing's motherhood after being injured, not only Not only Jiang Hua's paternal guidance to Lin Daojing, but also the brilliance of Lin Daojing's maternal nature. The image of Lin Daojing is not in a low position like the women described by traditional male

writers, but she and men support each other and make progress as equals.[7]

## 5. Revolutionary literature with women as the theme

"Song of Youth" was created in a special literary stage - the seventeen-year period. At the beginning of the work's birth in 1958, many proletarian critics criticized Lin Daojing's female identity and petty bourgeois intellectual identity in the text. Guo Kai believes that it is full of petty bourgeois personal sentiments and self-expression, but weakens the revolutionary content and lacks the bridge between workers and peasants. After the reform and opening up in the 1980s, with the introduction of feminism, liberalism and avant-garde literature, critics' attitudes towards "Song of Youth" also changed. They believed that Lin Daojing's pursuit of revolution was succumbing to revolution. It betrays female identity and "is the deconstruction and denial of female liberation." Therefore, in two different periods, the 1950s and 1960s and the 1980s and 1990s, the attitudes towards female writing in "Song of Youth" were also completely different.

The "Song of Youth" we see now is a revised version after criticism by Guo Kai and others. Mr. Yang Mo added that Lin Daojing successfully led the peasant movement in Ding County, Hebei under the guidance of "Aunt" and Jiang Hua. Lin Daojing's own femininity has been further weakened. She is no longer a woman, but a daughter, a party member, and a proletarian revolutionary. Lin Daojing's resistance and escape as a woman in the first half of the novel are ignored, replaced by reconciliation and cooperation with the peasant class, and her struggle for the liberation of the proletariat.

At the beginning of the birth of "Song of Youth", its female narrative was to serve the revolution. Lin Daojing's resistance and growth as a woman actually reflects the growth of the Chinese revolution. After the novel was revised, its female independence part was almost completely erased, replaced by Lin Daojing's understanding of the revolution and serving the revolution in the second half of the work. This triggered dissatisfaction and criticism of "Song of Youth" by a new group of critics and feminist writers after the reform and opening up.

Lin Daojing's two escapes provided an answer to the new democratic revolution for a key issue in old China - "What happens after Nora leaves?" Lin Daojing's first escape was from her family and the shackles of patriarchal and feudal patriarchal systems. However, after escaping from her family, she quickly fell into Yu Yongze's patriarchal trap. Although Lin Daojing was determined to become financially independent, she was hit by both her husband and society. In the end, she chose to escape for the second time, that is, to escape from her husband's power. When the question came to "what happens after Nora leaves?", Mr. Yang Mo chose the path of proletarian revolution for Lin Daojing, using Lin Daojing's identity as a farmer's daughter to pave the way for her to integrate into the revolution and resist class oppression.

We cannot absolutely say that Lin Daojing's tragedy of female identity is a foil to the revolutionary narrative, because revolution has in turn become one of Lin Daojing's solutions to escape male oppression. After the revision of "Song of Youth", it obviously highlights the status of revolution, but the author also potentially provides a unique solution to the issue of female independence, that is, joining the revolution and contributing to the liberation of all mankind.

In the "Eclipse" trilogy, the only female perspective narrative is Ms. Jing in "Disillusionment". Putting aside her weak female character, Ms. Jing's attitude towards revolution is not much different from Fang Luolan in "Shake" or Zhang Manqing in "Pursuit". The three people were unwilling to join forces with the reactionary forces, but they were helpless in the face of the failure of the revolution. Ms. Jing is different from Lin Daojing. Mr. Yang Mo's description of Lin Daojing has relatively clear female characteristics, although she always follows in the footsteps of men. Mr. Mao Dun almost ignored the femininity of Ms. Jing as a revolutionary, eliminated her gender characteristics, and almost equated her with a male revolutionary.

## 6. The contradiction between personal narrative and collective narrative

As a novel with a revolution as the background, especially a work with a proletarian revolutionary theme, the author's understanding of how to deal with the relationship between the individual and the collective and how to revolutionize and collectivize individual intellectuals was an extremely important issue of that era.

In this regard, Lin Daojing in "Song of Youth" is a woman who longs for independence. Her escape from the family and the process of revolution is her personal choice. After the revision, when Lin Daojing chose a path, her female gender characteristics were covered up, and the core of the novel became the story of how oppressed women awakened and turned over. When looking at "Song of Youth" from the perspective of a feminist novel, the narrative of Lin Daojing's transformation from an oppressed woman and a petty-bourgeois intellectual to revolution is particularly eye-catching, simply because the subject matter is so novel and prominent. After the revision, the emphasis on depicting the peasant and student movements made the work stand out from the crowd.

As for the "Eclipse" trilogy, which is set before and after the Great Revolution, it does not emphasize collectivist narratives. Young intellectuals do not reject their petty bourgeois identity, and naturally they cannot escape the wavering and weakness of petty bourgeois revolutionaries. They threw themselves into the revolution with enthusiasm, but when the revolution reached its lowest ebb, they became confused and hesitant, not knowing where to go.

## 7. Characteristics of the petty bourgeoisie

As Mao Zedong said in "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society", the petty bourgeoisie wavers in the revolution. When the revolutionary situation is good, they often join the revolution. When the revolution falls into a low ebb, they fall into confusion and even become reactionary. They are both won over by the revolution and favored by the reactionaries.[4] Therefore, when Mao Dun wrote the "Eclipse" trilogy, he was at the low ebb of the failure of the Great Revolution, and his characters were naturally at a loss. Ms. Jing's disillusionment again and again, Fang Luolan's wavering, and Zhang Manqing's decline are all symbols of the wavering of the petty bourgeoisie. When Yang Mo wrote "Song of Youth", New China had been born, China's new democratic revolution had been victorious, and the petty bourgeoisie naturally had an optimistic attitude towards the revolution, even though the background of the novel was still soberingly depressed.

Not only that, the pursuit of revolution by young intellectuals in the "Eclipse" trilogy and "Song of Youth" are completely different. Mao Dun created the "Eclipse" trilogy around the time of the Great Revolution. Intellectuals naturally strive for the interests of the bourgeoisie themselves. What troubles them is not only the shackles of the times and the weakness of the petty bourgeoisie themselves, but also the limitations of the social system. Mao Dun Disheartened after the failure of the Great Revolution, he wrote about the confusion and uncertainty of the petty bourgeoisie in the revolution based on his personal experience during the revolution. "Song of Youth" was created in the 1950s after the founding of New China. Lin Daojing was bound to move towards the path of new democratic revolution. The most fundamental difference between Lin Daojing and many intellectuals in the "Eclipse" trilogy also determines their different paths - Lin Daojing is not only from a petty bourgeois background, but also a victim of the comprador class and feudal landlord family. More importantly, her farmer mother and grandfather gave her a natural affinity for the proletariat. Therefore, the revolutionary path chosen by Lin Daojing is aimed at liberating the proletariat. She helped the proletariat along the way and received much help from proletarian revolutionaries, eventually reconciling with the proletariat and joining them.[8]

## 8. Summary

In general, the "Eclipse" trilogy and "Song of Youth" are more revolutionary novels than women's novels. Women's narratives often serve the revolution. As far as the revolution is concerned, they emphasize the role of the petty bourgeoisie in the revolution. One is pessimistic and the other is optimistic, which proves the weakness and wavering of the petty bourgeois revolution. As far as women are concerned, although they have improved their status in literary works to a certain extent, it is still difficult to change the dominant position of men; they

overemphasize revolution, weaken women themselves, ignore women's desires and needs, and regard women as A vehicle for revolutionary narrative.

On the other hand, "Song of Youth", as a work by a female writer, also implies a way out for women's liberation in the revolutionary narrative - joining the revolution. Only by breaking the cage of class can gender equality be achieved.

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