

# Character analysis in *Love in the Falling City* -- combining and escaping from the restricted narrative perspective

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**Abstract.** With the continuous in-depth research on Zhang Ailing's feminist literature, great attention has been paid to the direction of her female characters. However, there is currently limited research in academic circles on the portrayal of male characters from a feminist literary perspective, and studies on the male characters in the book are often influenced by restrictive role-based perspectives. This paper analyzes the character image of the heroine Bai Liusu based on the original perspective of Zhang Ailing's *Love in the Falling City*, that is, the restricted narrative perspective, and combines different situations of female self, family, love and society to analyze, so as to understand how Bai Liusu escapes from the predicament of survival, how she is bound by tradition, and the differences between her and Fan Liuyuan's views on marriage. In addition, this paper analyzes the character image of the hero Fan Liuyuan from an objective perspective, finds out his true feelings for Bai Liusu from an objective perspective, and analyzes the rationality of his behavior in the article from an objective perspective. Through combining and breaking away from the restricted narrative perspective, the author find that their characters bring deeper meanings.

## 1 Introduction

*Love in the Falling City* is a novella by Zhang Ailing and an important representative work of "Shanghai School Literature", which is different from the fast modern life of the modern girl in the "New Feeling School". *Love in the Falling City* shows the real urban life of men and women. The story tells the love story of a divorced, traditional but new thinking woman named Bai Liusu and a young master of the new school named Fan Liuyuan who returned from abroad [1]. In their love game, they constantly test each other. Later, due to the outbreak of the Pacific War, they will rely on each other, naturally married, achieved this period of love. At present, the academic circles have made a lot of progress in the study of women in *Love of the Falling City*, such as the analysis of feminist stance in the 20th century, the historical situation of women in old Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s, and the study of women's internal audit consciousness. However, there are few researches on Fan Liuyuan's image [2, 3]. These studies are mostly based on the restrictive narrative perspective of the text to analyze Fan Liuyuan's shrewness, not only wanting to escape the responsibility of

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marriage, but also wanting to have real love, how is the Bai Liusu rhetoric. This paper aims to analyze Bai Liusu's view of love and marriage, as well as women's attachment consciousness to men and new breakthroughs in thought. This paper will get rid of the limitation of narrative perspective and objectively analyze the character image of Fan Liuyuan, so as to further analyze this magnificent love story.

## **2 Analyze the characters of Bai Liusu from the perspective of restricted narrative**

Zhang Ailing takes the third-person female protagonist's single narrative perspective to narrate the story. The single narrative perspective of the third-person heroine is a restricted narrative perspective, which is different from the omniscient perspective used in traditional narration. The narrator is equal to the author, which is convenient for arranging the plot and conducting profound psychological analysis [4]. This paper analyzes the character image of Bai Liusu from the perspective of limitation, through the limited perspective, the reader can better understand the bondage and escape of women in self, family, marriage and society in the era of the transition of old and new.

### **2.1 Self - The analysis of Bai Liusu's self-value**

Although Bai Liusu was oppressed by the feudal etiquette and patriarchal social tradition, she also had a strong sense of awakening. First, Bai Liusu dared to resist the feudal and conservative family. She proposed divorce, but also opposed her ex-husband's funeral, as well as the feudal and conservative thoughts of her relatives. When Fan Liuyuan was ready to go to England, Bai Liusu refused to go home and continued to stay in Hong Kong, thinking that the farther away from his family, the better. It can be seen that she has a strong sense of escape from her native feudal family. Bai Liusu has a clear understanding of men, understand that it is difficult to grasp Fan Liuyuan for a long time without the protection of marriage. In Hong Kong, Bai Liusu does not succumb to Fan Liuyuan's rhetoric and she is clearly aware of his pursuit of unconventional spiritual love. She will take the initiative to express her need for marriage, and when she can't get an answer, she will put it down. Bai Liusu in love pull, she will be decisive and patient, and so to the fan Liu original initiative to find her, master the love of the discourse initiative. Bai Liusu is a brave woman, she will be able to marry and Fan Liuyuan marriage as a gambling, gambling lost reputation is discredited, win can breathe out.

Bai Liusu has a strong sense of self-worth. For example, in the article she looked in the mirror, "Fortunately, she is not very old. Her kind of petite body is the one that does not show age, always a thin waist, like a child's budding breasts. Her face, which had once been as white as a magnet, had changed from a magnet to a jade - translucent, light blue jade. The top collar was round at first, but in recent years it has gradually pointed out that the small face is more and more cute. The face was rather narrow, but the brow was wide. A pair of delicate, dewy eyes"[1]. This passage shows that Bai Liusu understands that beauty is her advantage. She has a strong self-identity and knows where her utilizable value is, which has also become a weight that makes Fan Liuyuan fall in love with her.

Bai Liusu is good at seizing opportunities and clear people, and Fan Liuyuan dances three times to steal the treasure of the limelight, understanding that he wants to be a pure and clean and provocative woman, pretends to let Fan Liuyuan feel that he mastered himself, but also aloof. When Fan Liuyuan asked her to go to Hong Kong for the second time, she realized that it would be a good time to get rid of her native family, but also put her reputation and

future on the line. She knows that she has no way out, only to gamble everything to see if she can catch Fan Liuyuan to become Mrs. Fan.

## **2.2 Family -- hurt and bound**

The family affects the important reasons for Bai Liusu's view of marriage and life, because the family brings her more harm and bondage. Bai Liusu has no place in the family. The third brother and the fourth brother spent the money brought by the Bai Liusu divorce. When Bai Liusu ex-husband died, the ex-husband family hope Bai Liusu to the funeral. The third brother said, "You are born in his family, death is his ghost" [1]. Old Lady Bai gives more preference to Baoluo who is not her biological child. The behavior of the family not only makes the Bai Liusu feel the feeling of dependency, but also makes her lack of security. So many years she endured the oppression and harm of her family, this family environment is also why Bai Liusu was anxious to marry Fan Liuyuan a fuse. Later, through the heroine's restrictive perspective, she admits that the purpose of following him is financial security. The hurt brought by her family makes her seem to care more about material stability, she seems to believe that love can be fake, but money must be real.

At the beginning of the book, "The White Mansion uses an old clock, and their ten o'clock is other people's eleven o'clock", the first point is that the White Mansion also maintains traditional feudalism in the face of rapid urban modernization [1]. Most of the things handed to Bai Liusu by the family are traditional and backward, and even dancing is learned with her ex-husband. The first half of her life is oppressed by the family, and the marriage between the two families was arranged by their parents with the assistance of a matchmaker. Although she divorced after seven or eight years, the family also let her give her ex-husband mourning, and felt that adopting a child, and enduring more than ten years is good. The family brings not only the oppression of Bai Liusu by her family but also the oppression of her by outsiders. Bai Liusu seems to have no survival skills, her consciousness can only rely on marriage to change themselves. She and Fan Liuyuan's marriage is in "gambling", gambling is to take her to escape from the white mansion eating people. Bai Liusu put his whole body into the marriage and Fan Liuyuan, never thought of relying on himself, which is also bound by the traditional ideas of the white mansion.

## **2.3 Marriage - Social women's consciousness of getting married, and the discussion of whether to marry Fan Liuyuan for love or survival**

In the book, Bai Liusu believes that marriage is the guarantee of her survival, representing the traditional consciousness of women at that time. In the era of Bai Liusu's life, women's status was lower, even if new ideas emerged, but the traditional marriage, marriage concept was deeply rooted. Women have few means of survival in society. In this era of patriarchal society, women can only be forced to rely on men. Bai Liusu's sense of becoming a monk revealed the dilemma faced by women in the 20th century. Zhang Ailing used Bai Liusu's view of marriage to show that women at that time were deeply trapped in the feudal tradition and wanted to get rid of the stagnant living situation [5]. It is also why Bai Liusu said in the article, "You simply say not to get married, not over, but also have to go around the big bend, what can't be done?" Even old-fashioned people like me still say, "First married from the relatives, and then married from the body [1]!" Bai Liusu and Fan Liuyuan's marriage are both about love and survival. Bai Liusu's predicament reflects the plight of women in an era, Zhang Ailing borrowed many women in the white mansion, depicting the women of that era consuming youth, Bai Liusu loves Fan Liuyuan, but her reason has been reminding her not to sink into it." She admitted that Fan Liuyuan was lovely and that he gave her wonderful stimulation, but her ultimate goal with him was financial security [1]." When Fan Liuyuan is

with Saheyi Ni, she is jealous, and when Fan Liuyuan says "I love you", her heart is pounding [1]. When war broke out in the Pacific, she feared she would drag him down. This is Bai Liusu to Fan Liuyuan's love performance.

Bai Liusu's love for Fan Liuyuan is also mixed with the pressure of society, family and survival. Bai Liusu and Fan Liuyuan first see, is fan Liuyuan and cousin Baoluo's blind date. Bai Liusu clearly understands that she stole the treasure of the limelight, but also realize that fan Liuyuan does not necessarily really like her. Because she understands her current situation, she feels that she may be able to rely on Fan Liuyuan's love for her to change the status quo." But she knew that although Baoluo hated her, she also looked at her with respect and respect." A woman, then better, cannot get the love of the opposite sex, and also cannot get the respect of the same sex. That's how cheap women are [1]. "Bai Liusu realized that women at that time were very dependent on men, and they were powerless to change [2]." With what little knowledge she had, she was able to be a good daughter-in-law and a careful mother [1]." Bai Liusu learning things are for the family, marriage, completely not for themselves. This also leads to Bai Liusu if leave Fan Liuyuan will not be able to live, so in order to marry Fan Liuyuan, she puts all her gambling up, and even do lovers are willing to.

## **2.4 Society -- the influence of social atmosphere at that time**

In the 20th century, Chinese society was changing from old to new, but the feudal ideology was still not eradicated. For Fan Liuyuan spiritual love concept, Bai Liusu is unable to agree. Through the ages, society's criticism of women is extremely harsh, let alone a divorced woman. Bai Liusu is also very concerned about the outside world of their views. Bai Liusu feels fan Liuyuan and her slow to get along, is to let her take the initiative to be fooled, even if the final separation does not need Fan Liuyuan to bear any responsibility. Be misunderstood by others as Mrs. Fan is very embarrassed, Bai Liusu does not feel happy. Bai Liusu believed that Fan Liuyuan tricked her, ruined her reputation and made it difficult to ride the tiger, and even could not hide her parents, only to become his mistress [6].

## **3 Analyzing Fan Liuyuan's characters from the perspective of restricted narration**

In this paper, Fan Liuyuan is described from the single narrative perspective of the female protagonist in the third person, that is, only from the female protagonist's perspective. This has influenced many researchers' analysis of Fan Liuyuan, making them tend to think that the emotion between Bai Liusu and Fan Liuyuan is not true love, but only a superficial love game [7]. However, this paper intends to break this traditional interpretation and break away from the restricted narrative perspective to analyze Fan Liuyuan's characters more objectively.

In many literary works, the male image is always the discourse center, but in Zhang Ailing's novels, the male role is a foil to promote the plot. Most of Zhang Ailing's novels start from the restricted perspective of women. From the perspective of restricted narrative, most of the descriptions of men in his novels are generalized, and most of the male images are quite charming and graceful, economically independent, and some are even strong in life [8]. Fan Liuyuan's image is mostly through the perspective of Mrs. Xu, as well as the eyes and heart of Bai Liusu to show the reader's perspective. From the perspective of women's restricted narration, Fan Liuyuan's image in the article is a rich young master who "has no intention of family happiness", "whoring, gambling, eating, and doing everything".

In fact, the various behaviors of Fan Liuyuan are contradictory with his image in other people. At the outbreak of the Pacific war, Fan Liuyuan came back to pick up Bai Liusu and fled together regardless of his own. When Fan Liuyuan was alone with Bai Liusu, "he was

always gentle and gentlemanly"; He said to Bai Liusu, "With you, I like to do all kinds of stupid things." As for riding around on a tram, watching a movie I've seen twice... [1]" He will also fantasize about taking Bai Liusu to the forest, or even Bai Liusu running in a cheongsam; And watch her for her little movements. His behavior in Bai Liusu's perspective seems to just flirt with her, speak some sweet words, and want Bai Liusu to fall in love with him. However, getting rid of Bai Liusu perspective is obvious that Fan Liuyuan's state is like a person in love, and he becomes a very emotional and even naive image around Bai Liusu. His behavior can be seen that Fan Liuyuan has a sincere, emotional and romantic attitude toward Bai Liusu.

The male image in Zhang Ailing's novels always struggles and explores at the cultural and spiritual levels. Fan Liuyuan was born and lost, and could not "cultivate oneself"; He "has no interest in family happiness" and cannot "keep the family together"; He also went straight to "the wild road." Even further away from "governing the country" and "leveling the world" [9]. It can be seen that Fan Liuyuan deviates from the traditional Chinese cultural values, that is, he goes against the traditional "three principles and five constants". In traditional culture, a man's mission is to have a wife and children, and he must bear heavy responsibilities. His actions are also a kind of traditional male liberation, promoting male self-awareness.

Fan Liuyuan "lived alone in the United Kingdom" since childhood, in British society at that time, the people of weak countries could not be recognized in the mainstream society. Returning to China, he was also regarded as a "foreign alien", and his family held a hostile attitude towards him [10]. Fan Liuyuan's situation reflects his unrecognition in society and family. Fan Liuyuan is a marginal person who walks in Chinese and Western culture, "He is a foreigner in appearance, but he yearns for authentic Chinese things and is the most stubborn and old Chinese things [1]". So Bai Liusu is full of traditional Chinese classical charm of Chinese women will attract him. In addition, they have similar family situations and can understand each other's sense of loneliness and loneliness. It is this spiritual connection that makes Fan Liuyuan think that Bai Liusu and he are the same kind of people, and they are the same marginal people [11]. When Bai Liusu was picked up, Fan Liuyuan said, "I thought, away from those people in your family, you might be more natural. "He wanted to keep Bai Liusu away from worldly gossip and wanted her love for him to be pure [5]. In a world of disapproval, he thought it might be wonderful for two lonely people to lean on each other. However, Bai Liusu and Fan Liuyuan's view of marriage is very different, she believes that the benefits brought by marriage are more important. From the perspective of Bai Liusu, Fan Liuyuan's true feelings seem to be an excuse to make her a mistress, a kind of rhetoric to deceive him.

In the love game of Fan Liuyuan and Bai Liusu, he knows that Bai Liusu loves him, but he is always unsure, he wants to know clearly whether Bai Liusu and he are together for marriage form. He and Sahei Ni together, also just want to make Bai Liusu jealous. Others in the article called Bai Liusu for Mrs. Fan, so that she had a misunderstanding, that Fan Liuyuan deliberately close to themselves, let others think that they have already had a relationship between men and women, so that her reputation was damaged and forced to become his lover. But in fact, Fan Liuyuan has fallen in love with her and wants to marry Bai Liusu. He had been trying to seek understanding from Bai Liusu, even to the point of begging. In the book, he thought for a moment, became irritated, and said to her: "I don't understand me myself, myself - but I want you to understand me!" I want you to understand me!" As he spoke, his heart was already despairing, and yet he persisted and pleaded, "I want you to understand me! [1]"Fan Liuyuan's view of marriage demands to get rid of all kinds of worldly fetters, including money, property and family, and has the addition of Western idealism. What he longs for is a connection between the two minds, a spiritual connection.

Fan Liuyuan is a shrewd man in the text, although he is not recognized by the family, but got the right to inherit. He met Baoluo and chose to go to the movies in order to buy time, so that her makeup was worn off by oil, so that he could observe her more realistically. But he is in and Bai Liusu show a childish appearance, in order to let her and themselves together with many means. This also contradicts Bai Liusu's notion that he wants her to be a lover. In the article, "Live or die, we've made an oath, Holding hands, and husband and wife grow old together." He changed "we've made an oath" to "Find happiness in your company", indicating that he pays more attention to spiritual feelings [1]. In his dialogue with Bai Liusu, he expressed the attitude of how to talk about marriage without love, which is not to shirk the responsibility of marriage, but to emphasize the importance of emotion in marriage.

## 4 Conclusion

This paper finds that analyzing characters by combining and getting rid of restrictive narrative perspectives makes a huge difference. The author uses narrative techniques to make the reader hear the story she wants to convey. From the original perspective of the article, that is, the female main perspective, this paper analyzes Bai Liusu's female image, her marriage view and her survival predicament through various factors such as individuals and society. Secondly, this paper analyzes Fan Liuyuan's character image from an objective point of view, and explores his true feelings for Bai Liusu hidden in the book and his true thoughts hidden in the text. In the midst of the Pacific War, they let go of each other's worries and calculations and realized that they had each other to rely on. Bai Liusu gradually fell in love with Fan Liuyuan, she began to face her feelings for Fan Liuyuan, the mind on their own small home. Fan Liuyuan also realized that love is just a flower under the moon, Bai Liusu in his heart is already the existence of family. Combining and escaping from the restricted narrative perspective not only reveals the deep meaning behind their images, but also makes us understand that in addition to the true feelings in the "love of the city", they have true hearts for each other.

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