

The Ability Called Love: The Women in Chen Yingzhen's Writing

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Abstract. Chen Yingzhen has portrayed numerous women in his novels, most of whom are not the main characters of the stories, but only form the background of Chen Yingzhen's protagonists. These women are kind-hearted, sincere and accustomed to endurance. At the same time, they have an inextricable dependence on the opposite sex, and it seems to Chen that there are no women in the world with independent tendencies. In this way, women are perpetually subjected to the dictates of male discourse and become marginalized in a patriarchal society. This study summarizes the family identities and artistic images of Chen Yingzhen's common female roles, analyses the characteristics, aesthetic intentions and ideological expressions of Chen's design of women's roles. Furthermore, it interprets how women get rid of the constraints of the "ability to love", realize gender awakening and construct their own subjectivity from the fertility imagery of Chen Yingzhen's literary works. The aim is to make the women's literary images in Chen Yingzhen's works visible and to stimulate contemporary readers to think about women's narratives and rights.

1 Introduction

Many scholars tend to regard Chen Yingzhen as a male-centered writer. Li Ang, a famous Taiwanese writer, once pointed out that Chen Yingzhen is a "very male-centered" writer. "Most of his female roles are sensual and tender, with the typical characteristics of Mother Earth. Chen Yingzhen portrays these maternal women to comfort men who need to prove themselves constantly, because they have endless anxiety, a sense of defeat and fear. This is a tone of Chen's creative mindset [1]."

Indeed, the female characters portrayed by Chen Yingzhen are almost invariably male companions or bear the male gaze, appearing as a maternal, soothing object of male desire and wounds. These women are often not the protagonists who are melancholically contemplating family and national affairs or wanting to accomplish something [2]. Women are beautiful and sensitive, but this beauty is only a pastime for men; women dare to love and hate, but they are still lingering between one cowardly man after another, unable to get away from them. Their value is only as a mother, a wife, a lover, a sister, a daughter of someone.

Therefore, this study will focus on the various female artistic images in Chen Yingzhen's works, to see the women who serve as an outlet for Chen's inner entanglements, ideologies,

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aesthetic forms, and redemptive intentions. Eventually, see the women who have gone from submissive to defiant, who have almost lost their basic human rights, but are still asked to have “the ability to love”.

2 Wives and mothers: shaping paternal authority as the Other

Chen Yingzhen’s novels portray a variety of families in which the father usually plays the role of a paternal authority figure [3]. However, Chen generally does not portray a bright and magnificent father figure. He rather allows these fathers to exist in the memories of the protagonists like shadows of the old days, or hidden in the unspoken background of the story, and continue to exert a great and deep influence on the motivations of the other characters. At the same time, Chen Yingzhen will illustrate the female figure, who is dependent on her male partner, and the son figure, who obeys, fears, and worships his father, forming the Other that constructs the authority of the father through colorful portrayals [4].

2.1 The qualities of the female Other are in line with the construction of patriarchy

First of all, these women all have sexual characteristics that are attractive to the opposite sex and suitable for reproduction and fertility. “Fat lips, plump hips, firm breasts, and short hands.” Liu Xiaoling in *Night Freight* says: “I have children and you have nothing...” Children are a powerful weapon in her fight against men and become the dominant trait in the construction of her image—the trait of motherhood. Secondly, they are the weak ones who are always in tears. From the mom in *Noodle Stand* who sheds tears now and then for her sick child, to Tang Qian, who weeps like a delicate mother who lost her baby in *The Comedy of Narcissa Tang*, all are images of mothers who think out of weakness. Furthermore, they limit the way to realize their own value to the family. Cai Qianhui, a female revolutionary in *Mountain Road*, can only choose to devote herself to a family, take up the role of a sister-in-law, and atone for her sins by supporting her family. Finally, they are incapable of expressing themselves, and can only remain silent and wait. In *Night Freight*, Liu Xiaoling “sadly guards the scars of a man, but this is the kind of happiness she longs for!” Lin Bizhen in *My First Case* waits for a man who looks like a seafaring man, and this man may leave at any moment in response to his call [5]. In *One Day Afternoon*, director Fang remembers his wife as “silent as an ancient temple in the barren mountains of his hometown”. Tang Qian, a famous intellectual of her time, reveals a motherly silence in the eyes of her different lovers. The endless waiting and waiting makes the woman a woman to be enlightened, she leaves all the space for development in the story, waiting for the male to write his own history [6].

2.2 The patriarchal utopia of Chen Yingzhen

In this way, Chen Yingzhen constructs a “patriarchal utopia” in his text through this lateral narrative strategy. What must be seen is that the patriarchal power he constructs is different from the Western concept of patriarchal power. Its focus is not on promoting the idea of the inferiority of men but on reconstructing a stable center of the family, the father. Based on families, a stable social model of patriarchy in agrarian society is then built, thus trying to provide people with a stable and prosperous paradise on earth.

Therefore, Chen’s patriarchal utopia has something in common with the patriarchal model espoused by Confucianism. The father in Confucianism is the core of a family, in a position of dominant leadership, and his power lies in absolute spiritual domination. Women must obey the Three Obedience and Four Virtues, and submit absolutely to male spiritual

domination and material control. Most of the women portrayed by Chen Yingzhen happen to be weak, silent, reproductive mothers or wives awaiting enlightenment.

Mother and son, these two Other-like figures in Chen Yingzhen's writing are similar to women and children in Confucian patriarchy, both emphasize the dependence of women and sons on their fathers. They are merely functional roles that shape the father's image, and when the patriarchal power needs to suppress the subjectivity of these roles, it expels them outside of itself and drives them into a safe zone of his own, the position of the Other [7].

3 Women as mirrors: Chen Yingzhen's self-repair and self-projection

Intellectuals use words as a tool and writing as a means of struggle, participate in the development of the society and the destiny of the country in which they live. As an ideologically distinctive example in Taiwan's literary scene, many of Chen's works and character designs contain specific ideological stances and self-consciousness, inextricably linked to the literary trends and political transmutations of the time. These works reflect Chen's power of action to intervene in society, he has always been committed to mobilizing people to think about national unity and development in different ways. They also reveal the trauma Chen has suffered, the sadness of not being understood, and the pain of being caught in the middle of separatism between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait [8].

3.1 Political persecution and self-repair in literature

In terms of story archetypes, the short story *Clouds* carries Chen Yingzhen's self-repair. After his second arrest, Chen Yingzhen was searched by secret agents, and his notes from interviews with female workers were scattered all over the place. From then on, he confirmed that he would continue to dedicate his writings only to his beloved China and her people, as a way to protect himself as well as to protect the people and things he saw. It can be said that love contained in the line "those who live for others are the ones who truly live for themselves" is not only to inspire the women workers in the novel. It also contains Chen Yingzhen's firm intention: to be able to take the initiative to change himself, and then to change the lives of those around him, this is happiness. It is also a blessing to be grateful to others for what they have practiced.

One of the main characters in *Clouds*, Xiaowen, what happens in the collective life makes the simple love and friendship in her to be forged. She firmly believes that people should be friendly to each other and live honestly. Even if she fails in her struggle, Xiaowen still wants to live her life in order to make the people and the life around her warmer and friendlier [9]. People like Xiaowen have mute integrity and a sense of justice and courage that is not declared. They suffer losses and insults, but always live diligently and positively, which is also the condition of Chen Yingzhen. Even though he has been criticized and even persecuted by the authorities, Chen has not chosen to speak out and accuse. He only uses *Clouds* and other works to reveal his writing morals and his hope for cross-strait harmony, making the spiritual connotation of *Clouds* more and more robust and sincere.

3.2 Chen Yingzhen's religious projection and self-redemption

Chen Yingzhen's short story *Mountain Road* is small in size, but it includes almost all the themes of his creation. Christian faith-based repentance and redemption, humanitarian concern for the poor people at the bottom of the hierarchy, concern for the sinking and loss of the revolutionary ideals, the revolutionary spirit of dedication to the well-being of the

underclass laborers. These themes are unified through the portrayal of Cai Qianhui as a female figure, making her present complex spiritual connotations and psychological layers.

Cai Qianhui, the soul of *Mountain Road*, has another moral intention in mind when she arrives at the Li family's home. Posing as a "sister-in-law", her dedication to the Li family imitates Li Guokun's (the brother from Li) dedication to the revolution. It is also an atonement for her brother's betrayal of his compatriots, as well as a concrete practice of a noble moral ideal. Thus, the image of Cai Qianhui necessarily carries a strong left-wing color and religious spirit. She "labors fiercely, enslaving her body and spirit as if she were viciously mistreating others"; she is brave enough to "break her own body and spirit for the sake of those who are bent on dying for the well-being of others". Chen Yingzhen projects his Christian faith on her. The image of Cai Qianhui is understood as a Christian idea with radical revolutionary colors. At the same time, it also possesses the Christian dedication of sacrificing oneself for the well-being of the poor and the needy.

Cai Qianhui's left-wing sentiments are also manifested in her concern for the underclass. Cai Qianhui takes advantage of the supervisor's inattention to deliberately scatter cinders outside, so that poor children can pick them up and burn them to keep warm. She says "If we are also poor, we should help each other"; singing "Hometown people, laborers...live in shabby houses, with bad doors and windows..." in between jobs. Chen Yingzhen's love is also the same. His love is not to love a country with good construction and prosperous development. It is to love the people that is hurt and insulted but can not raise their voices. This kind of leftist love, standing on the moral high ground through the beautiful and sublime Cai Qianhui gets a reasonable expression [10].

Chen Yingzhen uses Cai Qianhui to harshly criticize the "domestication" of those who only know sensual pleasures, and express his worry about the sinking and loss of the revolutionary ideals. When Cai Qianhui reads about the release of her former lover Huang Chennai from prison, she recalls the reason why she came to the Li family, and constantly questions herself whether it is right to indulge in a life of comfort nowadays. Cai Qianhui feels uneasy and guilty that society and individuals have forgotten an entire generation of people who sacrificed themselves with youthful fervor. She suddenly realizes the meaninglessness of her current social life and loses her faith in life, which is rapidly shrinking.

The ruggedness of the "mountain road" has another meaning. That is, the ruggedness of the pursuit of greatness and the inner sublime, the ruggedness of the pursuit of the soul's resting place. The young girl on the "mountain road" is a youthful song that eulogizes the great revolution, and represents the spirit of pursuing lofty ideals and exuberance. Nevertheless, the failed elderly Cai Qianhui is just a body domesticated and bred by the capitalist society. She wakes up in-time, so that she can stand at a high enough level of self-reflection at the last moment of her life, reading a poignant, beautiful and loud confession. In her letter to Huang Chennai, she recalls her "life of deliberate self-pity, living for others", hoping that "when she passed away, she will be able to win the appreciation of Huang and Brother Guokun" [11]. This is her ultimate salvation. And if she is saved, she will "fantasize herself in white clothes and red flowers, standing in the middle of Huang Chennai and Brother Guokun, as if she were going to receive the praise of the hard-working people like gods". It is implied here that Cai Qianhui's determination to stand on the high ground of the moral and aesthetic value system. It is also the end of her life of walking through the rugged mountains — to maintain the noble image of a revolutionary.

The character of Cai Qianhui embodies the sublime beauty of revolution over individuality and faith over human desire. Her quick transformation from a vibrant young girl to a weary old woman reflects this character's contradiction. This change, influenced by the specific moral and aesthetic viewpoints of her era, highlights a special luster of life and feelings. Through the character of Cai Qianhui, Chen Yingzhen accomplishes a self-redemption.

4 Reproductive rights and female awakening

In Chen Yingzhen's novels, “pregnancy” often recurs as a central plot point that drives the plot forward. It is also like a kind of mission and obsession that belongs exclusively to women. In *One Day Afternoon*, Mr. Fang loses his son, but his maid, Cailian, refuses to be bribed by money and prefers to keep the young master's posthumous son. In *The Eternal Earth*, Yi, after years of fear and hatred for a man, meets a young man from her hometown and becomes pregnant in secret. In *A Rose in June*, officer Barnai was killed in Vietnam, while his lover, Emilie, was pregnant with a child belonging to the two of them. *Clouds* mentions a female worker nicknamed “Squid”, Biyun, whose boyfriend denied her after she became pregnant by accident. Squid chooses to commit suicide in shame and despair, and is later rescued by Xiao Wen and Big Sister He. Jin, a maid in *Tears of Aging*, leaves because Mr. Kang refuses to have a child with her. In *Night Freight*, Liu Xiaoling lives her life “wandering from one man to another”. However, later because of her pregnancy, she finally resolves to break away from the existing state of life, and returns to her hometown in the south with Zhan Yihong. In *The Comedy of Narcissa Tang*, Tang Qian is forced to have an abortion. Like a bereaved mother, she and Mo “slowly build up a thin layer of frost” and eventually break up their marriage.

In Chen Yingzhen's stories, many women are as hostages to male desire. From the young maid A Jin in *Tears of Aging*, Tang Qian in *The Comedy of Narcissa Tang*, Liu Xiaoling in *Night Freight* to the maid Cailian in *One Day Afternoon* and the Squid in *Clouds*. All of them are the objects of desire that men chase in their sexual anguish. Fortunately, these women end up being driven by motherly instincts in the midst of lovelessness, and gradually realize gender awakening.

Perhaps in these days, the obsession with childbearing cannot be regarded as a successful example of the establishment of women's gender subjectivity. Since the rapid development of contemporary feminism and the feminist movement, women now have more choices. It is worth noting that in the chaotic wars and revolution, women who ran away with their children could not really detach themselves from men in terms of livelihood and emotion. Their destiny was only to “wander from one man to another”, from one man's lover to another man's wife. After all, women were independent and subordinate to men.

However, the choice of “leaving the father and keeping the son” is already the decision-making of many women in Chen Yingzhen's works after they have awakened their self-will, not out of the compulsion of any man around them. Under the constraints of the times, regaining mastery over one's own body can be considered to be an important step in the construction of women's own gender subjectivity.

5 The female capacity for love

As is explained in the previous section, the patriarchal utopia constructed in Chen Yingzhen's text is not centred on the feudal idea of male superiority. In fact, as a rational realist who was always concerned with social dynamics, Chen Yingzhen felt the impact of modern culture, mainly Western culture, on his patriarchal utopia in the later stages of his writing career. For example, the Western feminist movement, which led to the change of women's position and their awakening, reached its climax in the United States in the 1960s. In Taiwan, a region with close ties to the United States, the “New Feminism” movement emerged as early as the early 1970s. As a writer who pays close attention to reality, Chen Yingzhen cannot avoid the facts. Despite his intention to emphasize the dependence of women, in his later novel *Zhao Nandong*, there is a female authority such as Molly's mother in his vision.

This means that he has no intention to belittle women in his works. On the contrary, he praises women's persistence and bravery in love, and appreciates their financial independence.

Through the voices of some characters in *Night Freight*, people realize: “Chinese men are all third-rate lovers. In love, women are much more honest and much braver than men.” Although Emilie in *A Rose in June* is only a subordinate woman, she is clear about her own heart. Emilie bravely reveals her love to the foreign military officer. In spite of their difference in status and class and the uncertainty of the war years, she wants to firmly grasp this piece of floating love. “Just love me...completely...before you go.” Then there are some of the more fortunate women who are able to earn their own money and support their families. Rose, the alcoholic in *One Day of a White-collar Worker*, not only loves sincerely, but also ponies up a hundred thousand dollars to buy a house for her cowardly lover, Huang Jingxiong. These women, who seem to be what could be called “independent”, have the ability to live and love concurrently. They possess something that many men do not have.

6 Conclusion

In the patriarchal utopia constructed by Chen Yingzhen's text, those fathers need the reproduction, weakness, silence and enlightenment of their wives to shape their own subjectivity and male authority. Among the Chinese male intellectuals in the 1960s, there was a stark contrast between their heroic desire for saving the country and their disillusionment in reality. Facing the invasion of their homeland by foreign cultures and economic systems, their ambitions were not understood by anyone. The ideological gap between the left-wing intellectuals in Taiwan and the intellectuals in the mainland caused potential mental trauma to Chen Yingzhen. This trauma is difficult to express directly. As a result, it must be “gender-transformed” and decoded in a feminine female image in order to construct a male myth of self-redemption.

There is a popular saying on the Internet today that women seem to be born with the “ability to love” compared to men. The women in Chen Yingzhen's novels are characterized by their desire for love, their disappointment and attachment to men, and their determination to bear children. In contrast to the men who are immersed in the pain of their families of origin and unfulfilled ambitions, men allow their self-esteem to develop into jealousy, malice, and even violence poured out on their female partners. In the end, men are always plunged into a state of endless remorse, and are then forgiven. In gender relations written by Chen Yingzhen, the only way for women to take revenge on men seems to be to run away. Women take away and raise their common offspring, which proves more and more that devotion and motherhood are the inalienable nature of women. People stand on top of the accumulated layers of feminist development and have come to realize that women do not necessarily have to possess the ability to love. For women, whose rights to education, politics, and freedom of marriage are years behind those of men, taking back the power to love themselves is what matters.

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